

This book is with  
tight  
Binding

**THE TEXT IS FLY  
WITHIN THE BOOK  
ONLY**



231

N95

Noyes \$2.50  
The unknown God

Acc. No. 820098

**231 N95**  
**Keep Your Card in This Pocket**

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.



**Public Library**  
**Kansas City, Mo.**

**Keep Your Card in This Pocket**

BERKOWITZ ENVELOPE CO., K. C., MO.

KANSAS CITY MO PUBLIC LIBRARY



DATE DUE

17 Ju0 29		21	
17 Feb 38	NOV 25	22	
22 Mar 38			
6 Apr 38	FEB 6	32	
11 Jun 38 75	CE. T. MOORE		
JA 30	Center		AUG 13 1935
14 Jul 38 15	NOV 26 40	37	
180-30	69 1028 47	32	
28 Dec 38 65			
AUG 3	MAY 12 47	R	
AUG 12 40	NOV. 8	39	
AUG 26 40			
MA. 22 41			
NOV 17 42			
2001 WEST			
	69		
FEB 9 48			











THEN Paul, standing in the midst of the Hill of Ares, said: "Men of Athens, I behold you in all respects not a little religious. For as I was passing along and noticing the objects of your worship, I found also an altar bearing the inscription, *To the unknown god*. What therefore you worship in ignorance, that I proclaim to you."

Acts xvii, 22-23.

*Accedo tamquam caecus ad lumen  
claritatis aeternae.*

(St. Thomas Aquinas).

# THE UNKNOWN GOD

By

ALFRED NOYES

NEW YORK  
SHEED & WARD

1934

FIRST PUBLISHED MAY 1934  
BY SMED & WARD  
FROM 63 FIFTH AVENUE  
NEW YORK  
PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.  
BY THE POLYGRAPHIC COMPANY OF AMERICA  
NEW YORK

*Copyright in the U S. A.*

## CHAPTER I

*It might be  
The final test of man, the narrow way  
Proving him worthy of immortal life  
That he should face this darkness and this death  
Worthily, and renounce all easy hope,  
All consolation, all but the wintry smile  
Upon the face of Truth . . .*

THE BOOK OF EARTH





## CHAPTER I

THE bewilderment of the contemporary mind groping blindfold after some ultimate belief upon which it can support its own highest values, or reasonably sustain even its most necessary codes of right and wrong, is continually illustrated by flashes of disaster in the world around us.

A great change is working through our western civilization, and none can foresee the outcome. There are vast forces moving, not upon the face of the deep, but below the surface, out of sight; and neither men nor nations can tell whither we are all drifting. "Drifting" is the word, for an ultimate goal and purpose in our lives are no longer believed to be discernible by the human intellect. The task of keeping afloat a partially wrecked hulk so closely engages the greater part of the population that we have come to look upon the steering-gear as a relic of a superstitious age. It is not merely that the gear itself seems to be out-worn. There is no fixed star, no invariable compass, and no ultimate end at which to aim.

The authority of conscience, which philosophers were prepared to reverence if it might be called the "categorical imperative," has lost its weight for a great part of the contemporary world. Together with all the deeper human affections (which also present a blank countenance to the merely scientific investigator of their reality) it has been analyzed. The result is exactly what we should expect

of our best friend if we made an analytical enquiry into either his friendship or his personal honesty. We have lost a light in his eyes—a perfectly natural light—which, curiously enough, escaped the apparatus of our criticism; and we are now trying to console ourselves for the loss by remarking that, in any case, his friendship was an idle sentiment; his affection probably bestial in origin; and his honesty a useful but merely romantic observance of outworn and discredited taboos.

There have been former ages in which signs less vivid, though of precisely the same character, have announced that a civilization was dying. Even among the lights and music of the modern cities there must be few who are not sometimes haunted by the feeling that Belshazzar is once more the ruler of the feast; and certainly no thoughtful mind can lightly dismiss the many ominous indications that the long prophesied "Decline of the West" has already begun.

The signs are glaringly reflected wherever art and literature hold up a mirror to the surrounding chaos; and yet there is one remarkable difference between the evils that broke loose and destroyed nations in former ages and the evils that seem to threaten our own: there has been no age, hitherto, in which those evils were so largely the result of its own achievement, in a great many directions, of a partial good.

The specialist, in every department of life, has been very well defined as a man who knows more and more about less and less. It is a plain fact that, in our rapidly growing world, the extension of various kinds of highly

specialised knowledge, all valuable in their own way, has given us so many twigs to look at, that we are not only blind to the woods, but have almost ceased to believe in the trees.

We have evolved a race of specialists, each working along his own narrowing line, each developing a language of his own, and each diverging further and further from that central point of view which once enabled us (from the lost height of a great historic religion) to "see life steadily and see it whole." With the very best intentions, and in a most orderly and scientific manner, we have built an immense Tower of Babel, and we have been gradually overcome by the ancient penalty—a confusion of tongues.

In this confusion, the most vital concerns of our life, its purpose, its meaning, the great lines of our destiny, and even the large and comparatively simple results of the long struggle for knowledge, have been obscured by masses of analytical detail.

Literature and art, in the confusion of all their standards, show plainly that it is as difficult for them to reintegrate their intellectual vision as it is for the physicist to bring flowers and electrons into a single field of view, or for the philosopher to form a picture of the *Civitas Dei* from the statistics of savants who have devoted themselves to examining, with exquisite precision, the atomic structure of a hundred stones in its outer walls.

The need of the world to-day is a religious need. Consciously or unconsciously, all our thought, our art, our literature are impoverished by the lack of any positive

and fundamental belief with which they can confront, on equal terms, the vast universe opened up to them by modern science, and feel, as other ages felt, the throb of a definite purpose in human life. The world is groping for a religion in which it can believe without evasions, without dishonest ambiguities, without self-deception, and without superstition; a religion that answers our questioning, not with a false completeness where completeness is impossible, but by striking to the depths within us and making us feel that those depths have been reached; a religion that can speak to the profoundest realities of our own nature, so that we are stricken by the truth in its voice, as we might be stricken by the truth in a human voice, at some crisis of our lives; above all, at this moment, a religion in which the vaster universe of modern knowledge (with all that we think we know) can be enfolded, as the universe of the middle ages (with all that they thought, they knew) was organically enfolded in the religion of its intellectual leaders.

By a great part of the modern world, the historic religion of Christendom has been not so much abandoned as allowed to lapse. It has been found wanting, apparently, in one or another of those conditions; or the thought of its individual exponents has not developed quickly enough to meet the needs of the bewildered contemporary mind. It is quite certain that, while many other things have been gained, nothing has been discovered to take the place of what has been lost; nothing that so towers and spreads organic branches through the highest regions of thought, nothing that makes a comparable

attempt to face our deepest questionings; nothing that kindles our life with so vivid a sense of hidden meanings and definite purpose. But the Truth constrains us, even if it leads us to the general paralysis of complete scepticism and demonstrates the utter futility of all our human striving. "Clear views and certain," Mr. Thomas Hardy once wrote of his own agnosticism. Well, we cannot all have the certainty of agnostics, though it is from the agnostic standpoint that these pages begin. We are right to be constrained by the Truth, but we cannot immediately condemn those who at such a juncture confront Pilate with Pilate's own old question—What is Truth?

The following pages record their author's gropings towards the belief that he now holds.

The emotions at this time, as expressed in art and literature, are not to be trusted. Nothing is to be trusted whose first aim is "effect." Science, and science alone, seems to have retained its virtue in its determination to accept no creed that conflicts with the truth as it sees it, and in its determination to reject any theory of right or wrong, beauty or goodness, honour or justice, which rests on false foundations or illusory and outworn beliefs.

In the meantime, something else has happened, something that it is difficult to define or describe. Science has not changed its austere determination; but quietly and unexpectedly it has met Religion at the cross-roads. Each was going its own way, and each is standing with a new humility in the other's presence, before an unfathomable and eternal mystery.

So far as science is concerned, the change of attitude

seems to be due to a new recognition of the supreme importance of those values which it can neither measure nor weigh; and to a realization that, in their loss, our civilization may perish. At the last meeting of the British Association, the Chairman, in his opening address, struck this warning note when he affirmed that despite the material progress of the race, the spirit of man might be falling back in higher fields. There are many signs that, by some law of compensation, the scientific and industrial achievements of recent years have been purchased at a greater price than we knew. Not merely an individual Faustus, but the whole of our western civilization is being forced to ask the ancient question—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" And it now appears that, in the loss of the soul, all those other things may be taken away also; and that houses made with hands cannot stand without foundations any more than the other kind.

On the intellectual side, the great change that has gradually overtaken the religious beliefs of the Western world was characterized at first by an austere regard for truth, and a moral earnestness which made the more conventional utterances of the religious sects appear comparatively shallow.

Nobody born in this century is likely to have experienced the throes of that sharp severance of human nature from the noblest hopes that the race had ever cherished. We speak of it lightly enough now, and it is a subject for the sneer of the popular novelist. Yet—after all—it was nothing less than a condemnation to eternal death of

countless generations who had been taught from childhood that they—and those whom they loved—were destined for eternal life. They believed that they had this key to the riddle of their existence. They were here to learn, through discipline, the secrets of immortality. Pain, grief, and even evil, had become more intelligible in the light of that purpose; the values of the human soul were not earth-bound or time-bound. Beauty, truth and goodness belonged to the eternal world. Man was capable of rising to a higher order and entering into communion with his Maker. He could stretch out his arms, not altogether in vain longing, to those upon the ulterior shore. He could look through time and see their faces more and more clearly, beyond the severing gulf, as he drew towards his own appointed end.

And then—from this ineffable height of vision—an entire generation saw the light of immortality withering on the distant faces of their beloved dead.

They were led down to the lower slopes again, where Science pointed them to the dust from which they had risen, and told them, with the moral fervour of a new Isaiah, that their former belief was interwoven with a false theory of the universe, and that, wherever they thought they had been relying on verifiable facts, they had been relying on delusions. Just as in the case of the other specialisms, where there had once been a co-ordination of two aspects, there was now an insistence on one alone. The dust must return to the dust, as even the older wisdom had hauntingly affirmed; but the rest of the ancient sentence was to be blotted out, thus, quite simply:



"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was."

Best things were to die, and stocks and stones to endure. The great inheritance of mankind was to be cancelled at a stroke of the pen.

While they had felt secure in it, many of them had given it little thought. It was taken for granted, like the light of the sun; and, when it was lost, there were those who welcomed the darkness. But in thousands of deeper minds a tragedy was enacted that, in one respect, was more poignant and ironical than our philosophy has yet measured. For the loss and the pang were infinite and they were to be borne, not by a God, who even when he cried "forsaken" could still fix his eyes on heaven, but by men who could fix their eyes only on the dust.

Later generations can hardly even guess at the mental suffering of the more thoughtful in that time of transition. Many of the young of that day might well have echoed the bitter words of Hardy:

"We come to live, and are called to die.

That—that's the thing . . . .

Life proffers to deny."

I remember the cold sense of reality, and the deepening shadow of a new loneliness that crept into the mind and heart of one boy of sixteen who began to read Huxley in the last decade of the nineteenth century. He had been brought up with loving care in the Protestant religion, and having turned to Matthew Arnold, amongst others, for his answer to Huxley, he came upon a certain paragraph which, though it cut the ground from under his

own feet and left him poised over an abyss, he felt at once was the exact truth about the world in which he lived:

“There is not a creed which is not shaken; not an accredited dogma which is not crumbling; not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has placed its faith in the fact; and now the fact is failing it.”

I remember, too, the sense of stern truth which stirred me, and seemed to bring its own compensations, though the shadow still deepened, when I turned to Huxley again and unexpectedly found him quoting, with a new significance, the words of a Hebrew prophet:

“What doth the Eternal require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with the Eternal?”

Huxley had made his own alterations of phrase. He had substituted the “Eternal” for the “Lord” and “God” of the older version. But this, as I thought, made it all the more impressive. I did not see, at the time, that Huxley was unconsciously reinforcing his own phrase with values and associations which he had carried over from the old religion. Nor did I ask how much or how little he meant by that phrase—“the Eternal.” I felt (as he undoubtedly intended his readers to feel, in the whole drift of the passage) that he had not lessened its content, but heightened it, to the  $n$ th degree, by liberating it from some of its anthropomorphic limitations. I had not yet read Plotinus on the Negative Way; and I did not

analyse the literary effect or ask myself what the new and heightened content of the phrase really was, or how the elimination of its lesser values had enabled it to imply some supreme value before which even the head of Professor Huxley was bowed in reverence. It was clear to me even then, however, that so fine a head and so stiff a neck could hardly be thus completely bowed before a vague idea of endless duration or unlimited extension. It committed him, perhaps, to more than he realised. It acknowledged that, in the very nature of his Eternal, there were ethical requirements. This unconscious acknowledgment, indeed, characterised all the true men of science of that period.

## CHAPTER II

*The light is growing; and, with each increase,  
The frontiers of the night are widening, too.  
They grow and grow. The very blaze of truth  
That drives them back, enlarges the grim coasts  
Of utter darkness.*

*Man must bow his head  
Before the Inscrutable.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH



## CHAPTER II

THOSE words of T. H. Huxley, with all their implications, haunted me for years. His tone had impressed me, in this instance, as being deeper than that of Matthew Arnold in the other passage, though Arnold was pointing in the same direction, away from the outworn science and fabulous history, towards some eternal Reality behind the whole pageant of temporal phenomena.

It was the same with Herbert Spencer, whose philosophy I read eagerly about this time. The "facts" to which the Christian religion had "attached its emotion" seemed to be so discredited under the new scientific enlightenment that they were not now taken seriously by educated men of first-rate intelligence. Indeed, the whole Christian scheme was taking its place with the myths of Greece and Rome. This seemed to me as certain as that the Ptolemaic universe had given way to the Copernican. No agnostic of to-day (not Sir Arthur Keith even) could have been more confident than I, that this thing was settled.

It was in this mood that I read Spencer's *First Principles* and found him, too, in his remarkable overture on the "Unknowable," pointing in the same direction as Huxley and Arnold, to some eternal Reality behind the whole flux of temporal phenomena. He affirmed that nothing whatever could be known of this Reality and then proceeded at considerable length to demonstrate:

(a) That, indirectly, by the use of reason, we actually know more about it than about anything else whatever.

(b) That this knowledge coincided with the conclusions reached, along the same road of reason, by the master-minds of Christendom.

He sets out to show that we are strictly limited to "relative knowledge" of phenomena or appearances; but this knowledge being only "relatively" true is not really knowledge at all. The colours of the world, for instance, as they appear to me, may be very different from those that are seen by my neighbour; though, as we have agreed on names, we shall never discover it.

He tries to show that we can never pierce beyond this illusory veil, either to "things in themselves" or to the ultimate Reality. He proves this to his own satisfaction by an inexorable logic which, if pursued to its conclusion, would completely shatter his own philosophy, and wipe out the possibility of any knowledge whatsoever, on any subject, in the heavens above, or the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. He then seems to realise his danger and begins to withdraw, step by step, until—unconsciously—he has conceded the whole case to the authors of the Book of Job and the *Civitas Dei*. Indeed, with his various "incomprehensibles," it seems to me now that he was in imminent danger of reconstructing the groundwork, if not of rewriting, in slightly more modern terms, the Athanasian creed.

He accepts, rejects, and then accepts again and finally, for other reasons, his own logical proof of the positive

existence of a supreme, omnipotent, unconditioned, incomprehensible, uncaused Cause of the whole creation. He uses every one of these phrases and, so far as it goes, indeed, his proof could hardly be bettered, though it had been far more subtly stated by the master-minds of earlier centuries, writing unperplexed by the modern confusion of tongues. In his chapter on ultimate religious ideas, he writes:

“When we ask how there come to be in our consciousness impressions of sounds, of colours, of tastes and of those various attributes which we ascribe to bodies” (he puts himself at a disadvantage, it will be noticed, as compared with the master-minds, by omitting all higher values), “we are compelled to regard them as the effect of some cause. We may stop short in the belief that this cause is what we call matter. Or we may conclude, as some do, that matter is only a certain mode of manifestation of spirit, which is therefore the true cause. Or, regarding matter and spirit as proximate agencies, we may attribute all the changes wrought in our consciousness to immediate divine power. But be the cause we assign what it may, we are obliged to suppose *some* cause. And we are not only obliged to suppose some cause, but also a first cause. The matter or spirit or whatever we assume to be the agent producing in us these various impressions must either be the first cause of them or not. If it is the first cause, then the conclusion is reached. If it is not, then by implication there must be a cause behind it.



"But now, if we go a step further, and ask what is the nature of this First Cause" (the unexpected change to capitals was made by Spencer, not by the ironical spectator), "we are driven by an inexorable logic to certain further conclusions. Is the First Cause finite or infinite? To think of it as limited necessarily implies a conception of something beyond its limits. . . . Thus it is impossible to consider the First Cause as finite. And if it cannot be finite, it must be infinite.

"Another inference is equally unavoidable." (The ironical spectator was again forced to observe that Spencer was making considerable progress in the knowledge of his Unknowable, by means of "inferences," also that these "inferences," none of them original, were permissible only to "agnostics.") "Another inference concerning the First Cause is equally unavoidable. It must be independent. If it is dependent, it cannot be the First Cause. But to think of the First Cause as totally independent is to think of it as that which exists in the absence of all other existence. It can have no necessary relation within itself. There can be nothing in it which determines change and yet nothing which prevents change; for if it contains something which imposes such necessities or restraints, this something must be a cause higher than the First Cause, which is absurd: Thus the First Cause must be in every sense perfect, including within itself all power and transcending all law." (Even the sacred laws, one observes, of the "material" world have at last dwindled

into subservience here.) "To use the established word," said Spencer, "it must be Absolute."

To use the even more firmly established word, as it seemed to me, it must be "God." I could see no difference whatever between this logical conclusion of nineteenth century "agnosticism," and the opening affirmation of the Nicene Creed, except in the incomparably nobler and more adequate expression of the latter: "I believe in one God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible."

It is true that Spencer, immediately after reaching this conclusion, begins to undermine it, not in his own words, but by a long quotation from a second-rate theologian, of whom he observes with obvious malice that, "writing as he does in defence of the current theology, his reasonings will be the more acceptable to the majority of readers."

It is difficult to say why Spencer adopted this crooked method, unless he was doing his thinking as he went along, on the principle of *solvitur ambulando*. He uses the arguments of a second-rate theologian, of whom he is openly contemptuous, to undermine his own real conclusions. Using these arguments, which he accepts without question, as though they were equally valid with his own, he arrives at a further conclusion—that "Atheism, Pantheism, and Theism are alike unthinkable." Then, in the very next sentence, of about a dozen words, he tells us that if we adopt this latter view, we are in grave error. He proceeds, however, to involve us more and more deeply in this grave error, until finally, after many pages, in a later chapter, he tells us explicitly what

this grave error is, and we find him once more in unconscious agreement with those master-minds of Christendom.

Although the conclusion that we cannot rationally affirm the positive existence of anything beyond phenomena had seemed unavoidable, he says it involved a grave error. It did, beyond all question, and for nearly two thousand years almost every child in Christendom had been taught how to avoid the fallacies which he now laboriously explained.

➤ Complete comprehension of the greater by the less is obviously not possible, but it is not the only relationship "thinkable" between them. It is not even the most intimate relationship "thinkable." Spencer and his fellow agnostics seemed to be utterly blind to the richness and depth of even our human experience of this obvious truth, and this is the complicated language in which he tries to redeem their error:

"Besides that definite consciousness of which Logic formulates the laws, there is also an indefinite consciousness which cannot be formulated. Besides complete thoughts, there are thoughts which it is impossible to contemplate, and yet which are still real, in the sense that they are normal affections of the intellect."

Alas! poor poets! How many thousands of times have you said this, in the loveliest music of which the human tongue is capable, and for how many thousand years! And this poor stumbling, withered anatomy of a sentence was the highest reach of the synthetic philosophy on

its most sublime subject. It fumbled round that poor lost word "affection," almost as though it might pause there, with a stirring of life. But no—those "affections" must be "normal" and of the intellect only. Though it answered a thousand thousand riddles on every side, there was no need to consider, or even to mention, the philosophy in which the first minds of Europe had found the master-light of all their seeing.

It is possible, of course, that Spencer, being a specialist, was unaware of their contribution to the thought of the world, for he was essentially a man of his contemporary environment; and it is difficult to see why he should have abstained from measuring himself against the giants and devoted himself, in controversy, to attacks upon the religious crudities of third-rate minds. He could hardly have wasted so much time in attacking what he called the carpenter or furniture theory of creation if he had caught a single fleeting glimpse of St. Augustine writing of *Genesis* in the fourth century:

"We must not understand these words in a puerile manner."

The occasional harshness of Spencer's language might have been justifiable if he really had encountered contemporaries whose "inferences" about the Unknowable went as far beyond his own as he asserted. He might well be contemptuous if he had really been told, as he asserted, that "actions instigated by an unselfish sympathy or by a pure love of rectitude are intrinsically sinful"; or that piety claimed to stand behind the omniscient Creator and understand the entire process. Human nature has

many failings, but it is not by its crudest failures that great matters of this kind have to be settled; and certainly failures of this kind are not characteristic of the religious attitude of man to his Maker. If Herbert Spencer had ever been at a midnight service in one of the great cathedrals on Christmas Eve, and seen the multitude of worn faces transfigured (by an illusion, if anyone cares to call it so, but still transfigured), he would scarcely have helped to propagate a libel on religion, even though one of its minor professors had annoyed him in controversy.

But there is another side to this question. Agnostics may justifiably insist (and they are at one with all the greatest religious thinkers in their insistence) on the strict limitations of the intellect of man in his approach to the Supreme Power, even though they are forced to allow a thousand indefinite forms of consciousness, incomplete apprehensions, and "thoughts that break through language and escape."

But it was nothing less than arrogant effrontery on the part of nineteenth century "agnosticism" to assert or imply that the Supreme Being, the Creator of all things, was incapable of entering into any intelligible relationship with that creation, "stooping to man that man might rise to God." This relationship was not a merely Christian hypothesis. It was one of the master-keys of the world's philosophy; and it did bridge an otherwise unbridgeable gulf in the universe, a gulf of the kind that science and philosophy abhor. It had inspired some of the greatest masterpieces of the world's literature, the

superb passage, for instance, in the Symposium of Plato, on Love, the Mediator between God and man:

“What then is Love?” I asked. “Is He mortal?” “No”—“What is He, Diotima?”—“He is a just spirit—” “And what,” I said, “is His power?”—“He interprets,” she replied, “between the divine and the mortal.—He is the Mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in Him all is bound together, and through Him the acts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries, find their way. For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse of God with man, whether awake or asleep, is carried on. The wisdom which understands this is spiritual.”

If, then, there were any sign of purpose in the emergence of conscious personalities from the blind coils of matter; if there were any significance at all in the fact that, where those personalities excelled, they seemed to approach most nearly to the *Valor valorum*, or the Divine; if Socrates, drinking the hemlock, and unconsciously foreshadowing the acceptance of an infinitely deeper and more bitter cup, were in that very act drawing nearer to the Eternal whose ethical requirements had so impressed Professor Huxley; then it was the very insanity of perverse arrogance for Spencer or Huxley or any other agnostic to announce that the creative Power was unable to establish or sustain any intelligible relations with its own creatures. They entirely overlooked this other side of the matter, though it formed the very crux of

the whole philosophy of Christendom. They never once dreamed of considering the most obvious possibility of all. To acknowledge a Supreme and Omnipresent and Perfect Being, the Creator and Cause of all things; and then dismiss it from all real influence in practice, and deny it all initiative and directive power was not rational. They might intimidate little children from approaching the Light of the world, but they could never intimidate that Light from shining, sooner or later, in their own darkness even though their darkness did not comprehend it.

## CHAPTER III

*Man is himself  
The key to all he seeks.  
He is not exiled from this majesty,  
But is himself a part of it. To know  
Himself, and read this Book of Earth aright,  
Were to discover music that out-soars  
His plodding thought, and all his fables, too.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH





### CHAPTER III

THIS "Unknowable" of the scientific agnostics, then, though it could never be *comprehended* by human thought, could at least be *apprehended* as the actually existing ultimate Reality, and must at least be characterized (according to the agnostics themselves) by some of its effects.

It was the Origin of the intelligible order of Nature. It was the Origin of that higher order of the mind, and that still higher order of the moral law which seems, at times, to transcend Nature, in the imperatives of justice and mercy.

So far, there seemed to be very little difference between these agnostics of the nineteenth century and the Apostle Paul of the first. Some of the invisible things, at least, might be "understood by the things that are made." Spencer, in fact, clearly stated that he intended his chapter on the Unknowable to establish a broad general agreement on the foundations of religion.

His remarks on the "Absolute" were simply a restatement in modern terms of a great section of Thomas Aquinas, which ends with the words, "And this is what we mean by *God*." Spencer speaks of the positive existence of this transcendent Absolute as "a necessary datum of consciousness." He says that "the belief which this datum constitutes has a higher warrant than any other whatever"; and he adds that, in this "assertion of a

Reality utterly inscrutable in its nature Religion finds an assertion essentially coinciding with her own."

These clear statements by the leading agnostics of the nineteenth century (including Darwin's emphatic assertion of "purpose" in the "grand sequence" of evolutionary events) had not been given their full weight in the controversies of the time, for the religious parties were naturally unwilling to reduce their whole case to so broad and elementary a basis. In the resultant conflict both sides forgot that there was any basis for agreement at all.

However this might be, I was resolved to begin at this broad and simple beginning. Around the one or two ultimate facts upon which all those cold rationalists had agreed with their adversaries, I began to reconstruct my own elementary philosophy.

They had not merely agreed that at the end of every line of thought there was a mystery. They had not merely repeated, in a new form, for the intellect, the obvious truth that the chief result of their physical discoveries was the enlargement of the frontier beyond which all was dark. They had agreed that they were confronted, ultimately, by a Reality that needed no other to produce it—an uncaused Cause which was therefore, in Spencer's own phrase, "supra-rational."

I had never heard of the ontological proof of the existence of God; and yet, after wading through endless pages of discursive reasoning in later life, it seems to me that all the essentials were mine by intuition, or direct mental vision, as far back as I can remember.

Lying awake at night, in childhood, with the sea breaking in the distance, under clouds or stars, in storm or calm, I know that, while I listened to its rhythmic ebb and flow, it seemed to be breathing in accord with some everlasting and inscrutable Power—the same through all the endless ages, past and to come; and I asked myself in the silence all the ancient questions about Time and Eternity, and was answered without words.

They were the old simple questions. "Time flowing in the middle of the night," out of a boundless past into a boundless future; or Time inconceivably beginning, and inconceivably ending? What was Time?

Space, going on for ever, or limited, and still forcing the mind to ask what lay beyond? What was Space?

But there were two questions which never failed to have an overwhelmingly strange effect upon me, in the silence of those nights by the sea. The first was nothing more or less than a very simple form of the question which Spencer asks in his chapters on the Unknowable: *Why should there have been anything at all?*

This infinite Reality which defied reason undoubtedly existed; but, if it had not existed, there would have been only one reasonable alternative. There should have been nothing at all, not even the blank space through which the mind insists on spreading the thought of nothingness. This, as I put it to myself, in those early efforts at thought, would have been in accord with what reason now told me. There *ought* to have been absolutely nothing. This would have been reasonable. Anything else at once implied that supra-rational Reality.

The existence of the smallest particle of matter, or the most insignificant self that could use those mysterious words *I am I*, was an utter impossibility—so my reason told me—an utter impossibility that was nevertheless also an overwhelming and stupendous fact.

It was the realization of this that enabled Blake to “hold infinity in the palm of the hand.” When the smallest particle of “matter” was actually in existence you could examine its structure; you could observe sequences; and you might label them natural causes and natural effects; but that the sum of things, with the whole system of causes and effects, should have been in existence at all—this was a fact so awful in its implications that, whenever it came upon me in the stillness of the night, it overwhelmed me, and I could only feel the exact scientific truth of the word which Spencer himself, in the last resort, was forced to use. It was “supernatural.”

“Supernatural” is a word from which even bishops, apparently, shrink to-day. It may be all the more salutary, therefore, for a layman to recall its exact use by comparatively modern men of science.

“Though as knowledge approaches its culmination,” says Spencer, who evidently thought highly of the achievements of agnosticism, “every unaccountable and seemingly supernatural fact is brought into the category of facts that are accountable or natural; yet, at the same time, all accountable or natural facts are proved to be in their ultimate genesis unaccountable and supernatural.”

With these sentences I always coupled the famous sentences of an even more practical man of science, Pasteur,

to whom civilization owes a greater debt than to almost any other of the last hundred years:

"We carry this conception of the Infinite within ourselves and it crushes us. What is there beyond that starry vault? We answer 'Fresh starry skies'? And what beyond those? The human mind, urged by an invisible force, will never cease to ask this question: 'What is there beyond?' The unappeasable question recurs and the cry cannot be silenced. It is useless to answer 'Beyond are unlimited distances, times, magnitudes.' No one understands these words. He who proclaims the existence of the Infinite—and no one can escape doing so—gathers into this assertion more of the supernatural than is to be found in all the miracles of all the religions; for the idea of the Infinite has a double character. It commands belief, and yet it is incomprehensible. When this notion takes possession of the understanding, one can but bow down before it. Looking, as I do, upon the words 'progress' and 'invention' as synonymous, I ask myself, in the name of what discovery, philosophical or scientific, can the human soul be detached from these high preoccupations? Their essence appears to me eternal, because the mystery which surrounds the universe, and from which they emanate, is itself in its very nature eternal."

"It is in ultimates," as Goethe said, "that we see God." Long before I had encountered the word "numinous" I had thus experienced the full reality for which it stands; and, crude as my attempts to arrange my thoughts about

it may have been, I have not yet found a philosopher who, with all his array of technical terms, can add one iota to that direct experience of early boyhood, in the silence and loneliness of those nights by the sea.

It is necessary to say this, because—if there be any truth at all in the belief which began to dawn upon me—it must be accessible to the simple as well as to philosophers.

The second question bore very directly on that accessibility. It was a question that never failed to have a like effect upon me—of utter mystery, the simple childish question with which we all, at one time or another, attempt to fathom our own personality: “What is this that says ‘I am I?’” It was like trying to lift oneself into the air by tugging at one’s limbs. But it always ended in these certainties:

✧ (a) Whatever I am, I owe to that inscrutable Reality.

✧ (b) That inscrutable Reality is infinitely greater than I, for it is dependent on nothing for its own existence and has produced everything that exists, including all our human aspirations.

✧ (c) The inscrutable mystery of all existence was shared by me; for I, too, existed; and, being conscious, I could look some little way into that small part of the mystery which I called myself. I had, in fact, like all other human beings, a private wicket-gate into at least one enclosure of the great inner Kingdom of Reality—that part of it which is within ourselves. I could not comprehend the whole, but I could comprehend more

of it than the materialists allowed. I had at least some advantage over rocks and stones and trees; for I was "self conscious." I could look into the grounds of my own being and grope for my own roots. I could also look outwards and recognise what was akin to my own intellectual powers.

➤(d) Armed with this knowledge it was at least possible that, just as we learn to communicate with our fellow-men (though we cannot pluck out the heart of their mystery, and indeed we infer their very presence only from outward signs) we might be able to communicate with that other subtler Presence, behind the trembling veil of all phenomena. A Presence far more deeply interfused. . . .

(e) The unapproachable Being was not inhibited from approaching *us*. The agnostics had assumed this, unreasonably. In discussing this particular point (though not on other occasions) they seemed to regard the ultimate Reality as something fixed and remote, a kind of intellectual North Pole, whereas (by their own admission) it was the omnipresent Cause and Sustainer of all things, which could not be very far from any one of us, even though we knew it only as a new-born child gropes for its mother's breast.

(f) Our finite limitations, therefore, imposed no corresponding limitations on that Power and Presence whereby finite beings had already been led so far on the upward road from their obscure origins in the night of Time. The Power which had made them and at last enabled them to transcend the intelligence of the brute



was not their own, and it might lead them on to deeper and more direct knowledge and understanding.

(g) This was in accord with the principles of "evolution;" and it was in accord with that older and deeper interpretation of the process:

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

"But, when the fullness of the time was come" we received the adoption of sons.

## CHAPTER IV

*How should man find it? Only through those doors  
Which, opening inward, in each separate soul,  
Give each man access to that Soul of all  
Living within each life, not to be found  
Or known, till, looking inward, each alone  
Meets the unknowable and eternal God.*

WATCHERS OF THE SKY



## CHAPTER IV

AGNOSTIC as my reading had made me, with regard to all the historical "facts" of the religion in which I had been brought up, I was saved from the shallower scepticisms and still shallower denials of intellectual pride by my overwhelming sense of that inscrutable Reality, which—as the men of science said—was "supra-rational," or—as I put it to myself—an Impossibility that nevertheless existed. I invented a name for this Impossibility: "The ultimate Paradox," and referred to it all those other "impossibilities" which (much later) I found as old familiar friends in the "antinomies" of modern philosophers. But my mental vision was no more impaired by a lack of philosophical terms than my ability to walk by an ignorance of anatomy.

In the silence of the night, I could always turn my mind to that one supra-rational Fact. Sometimes, while its sheer impossibility and absolute certainty quietly and simultaneously dawned upon me, my mind reeled as though the Grand Canyon were opening at my feet; and yet I always found the strangest help and even comfort in that tremendous realization. The very completeness with which it baffled the intellect seemed to confirm my childhood, and (all-powerfully as that Reality encompassed and possessed me) the very completeness of its strength in some mysterious way had the same effect. My own helplessness seemed to involve a silent answer to my

deepest need, as though one were the complement to the other, and as though I were indeed its child.

There was another aspect of the same enigma which sometimes gave me a strange sense of the illusory nature of Time, or rather a sense of something that transcended Time. Looking back through the apparent boundlessness of Time, I used to ask myself how it was that the process of evolution had not reached its present stage a thousand years ago, or two thousand years ago, or a million million years ago. From whatever date we chose to look back there was an infinitude of Time behind it. If we looked back from the birth of Darwin there was an infinitude of Time behind it. If we looked back from the date of the Norman Conquest there was also an infinitude of Time behind it. At either date the evolutionist could draw upon a boundless past for all the Time required by his process of development; and, as I naïvely, but quite logically, put it to myself, if he wanted a thousand æons more, he had only to take them from that past infinitude. How was it, then, that with unlimited Time at the disposal of his theory at any date he chose, we had not arrived at our present stage of development a thousand years ago, or incalculable æons ago? The grimmest geologist can hardly ask for more than quite unlimited Time, and this he had already had at the most remote date conceivable by the brain, as many æons ago as there are grains of sand in the Sahara. How was it, then, that we had not arrived earlier? How was it, then, that this infinitude did seem for us to have one closed end—and that now, and not earlier, the little clocks of our particular history

were ticking, with so precise a beat, in this immeasurable abyss of Time past and Time to come?

It seemed (like the old comparison of God to an infinite circle whose circumference was nowhere, and the centre therefore everywhere) to give man a centrality of his own. It thus lent a new plausibility, unaffected by Copernicus, to the year which is the centre of human history, the year from which we reckon all our modern centuries, compute our calendars and date all our letters and newspapers. This might be accidental; but there was nothing accidental about the bearing of this youthful question on a certain argument of Huxley, or about the real answer with which it armed me beforehand against his unusually superficial attempt to dispose of the idea of a "First Cause."

"Suppose Y to be the imagined first cause," (he remarks in his essay on Hume) "and Z to be its effect. Let the letters of the alphabet, *a, b, c, d, e, f, g*, in their order, represent successive moments of time, and let *g* represent the particular moment at which the effect Z makes its appearance. It follows that the cause Y could not have existed 'in its full perfection' during the time *a-e*, for if it had, then the effect Z could have come into existence during that time, which, by this hypothesis, it did not do. The cause Y, therefore, must have come into existence at *f*; and 'if everything that comes into existence has a cause,' Y must have had a cause X operating at *e*, X a cause W operating at *d*; and so on, *ad infinitum*."

I was fortunate, perhaps, in that my first approach to the idea of a "First Cause" was not by way of philosophy. The phrase was always associated in my mind with the great sentence: "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last"; which lifts the whole problem into a higher region, transcending Time, where first things really come first in another sense altogether, and mechanical sequences of secondary causes and effects are transcended by an originating Will. Whether this view be accepted or not, the enigmas which I had set myself as a child (and Huxley in his essay directly asserts that a child may see the force of his argument) not only enabled me to see his own argument, but to see through it immediately. He was destroying the ground of materialism as well as of Theism, and implying that the cosmos had no real ground at all.

The usual form of the argument for a First Cause is not altogether satisfactory, for, though the argument itself is essentially sound, it is stated too discursively. It runs thus:

"In our experience, every event is determined by a cause. But that cause is itself an event determined by a cause. An infinite series of causes would give no explanation of how the causation ever began. There must, therefore, be an uncaused Cause, which is the ultimate Cause of the whole series of events which proceeds from it."

This from a very recent writer is one of the simplest and most lucid statements of the classic argument. The phrase "uncaused Cause" in the last sentence is prefer-

able to "First Cause" and almost defeats the only objection which has ever been brought against the argument as a whole. The common retort is probably as old as religion itself. There is nothing new about it, and it may conveniently be stated here in the words of two very different Victorian writers. The first quotation is from the somewhat dejected autobiography of John Stuart Mill (in which the new liberty does not yet seem to have softened the domestic dictatorship over "feelings" as well as "thoughts"):

"It would have been wholly inconsistent with my father's ideas of duty to allow me to acquire impressions contrary to his convictions and feelings respecting religion; and he impressed upon me from the first, that the manner in which the world came into existence was a subject on which nothing was known; that the question 'Who made me?' cannot be answered, because we have no experience or authentic information from which to answer it; and that any answer only throws the difficulty a step further back, since the question immediately presents itself, 'Who made God?' "

After this statement as to what he was "allowed" to think, he adds, with unconscious humour, "he taught me to take the strongest interest in the Reformation, as the great and decisive contest against priestly tyranny for 'liberty of thought'."

My second quotation is from Swinburne, who was in a very fine intellectual confusion about all such matters, a



confusion still further confounded by his adoration of the Theistic philosophy of Mazzini and the Theistic poetry of Victor Hugo:

“Before the growth was the grower, and the seed ere the  
plant was sown;  
But what was seed of the sower? And the grain of him,  
whence was it grown?  
Foot after foot ye go back and travail and make your-  
selves mad;  
Blind feet that feel for the track where highway is none  
to be had.”

Swinburne understood the handling of words, and his argument was well stated as far as it went, but he had mistaken his object of attack. He is protesting against the process of looking for a first cause as the first link in a chain composed of similar causes and stretching out endlessly through Time. On this point the romantic agnostic, Swinburne, is completely answered by the scientific agnostic, Spencer; and indeed Swinburne himself, in the same poem, asserts the existence of the uncaused Cause of all things, which is there not merely in the remote past, but now and eternally, as the Sustainer of the whole. It is possible to maintain that the universe had no beginning in Time; but we are then left with an endless chain on our hands which requires us to account for its existence, here and now. In plain, though probably quite unphilosophical, language, there might have been nothing at all. That would have been quite simple. But there is a universe in existence; and the mind

is required to account for this stupendous alternative, not by going back, step after step, in the analytical manner of science, but here and now, by asking what attributes are necessary to the Ground, whatever it may be, of an alternative so impossible, and so certain. It must, for instance, be self-moved, and self-dependent, and the only analogy we had for a self-moving Cause, was our own living personal will. This might be an imperfect or illusory analogy; but it was certainly the best, and indeed the only illustration we had, of a self-moving and really original Cause. Did it point, then, to a perfect Personal Will as the supreme Cause? There was no need to go back in time. Many of the greatest religious thinkers had held that the universe had no beginning and would have no end; but an adequate Cause for so strange an existence, a Cause with adequate attributes, was still necessary; and, in Shelley's words, the Eternal Spirit still sustained the world from beneath, and kindled it above

"Now and for ever God makes heaven and earth"

might be a true gloss upon the opening sentence of *Genesis*. If we could only see aright the wonders by which we are surrounded, we might be forced to say at once, we are face to face, here and now, with the *mysterium tremendum*, before which the hair of the prophet stood on end. But, wherever we halt, wherever we meet this unfathomable mystery of the uncaused Cause we are forced to postulate the attributes of Spencer's Unknowable. It is supra-rational, supernatural, eternal and omnipresent; and, so far, it seems to be at one with the Power in which,

according to St. Paul, "we live and move and have our being."

It includes the attributes of Spinoza's "necessarily existent Being"; and we are bound to find in it the *valor valorum* and *ens realissimum* of older and greater philosophers. When we have thus considered even a few of the attributes which the mind finds necessary in such an ultimate and self-sufficient Being, we are again forced to say with Aquinas "This is what we mean by God."

It is just here that the weakness of the question of Huxley, Mill and Swinburne becomes apparent. Like so many of the contemporary attacks upon religious beliefs, it really confirms the very belief it tries to destroy. No philosopher has yet asserted (so far as I know) that nothing exists at all. If anything does exist, then—unless there is some other ultimate Being—it is itself the ultimate Being, and the man who asks with so wise an air "Where did the ultimate Being come from?" has actually discovered, without knowing it, the whole ground of religion. It is just because there is no possible answer that we say of Being, in its ultimate aspect, that it is supernatural. We may speak of it, with Spinoza, as *Deus sive Natura*; but, at whatever ultimate our reason allows us to halt, the one absolute mystery is there. The naïve question does not alter or abolish that one silent but tremendous Fact.

"The riddles remain," says Höffding, "when we pass over from science to religion"; but as he admits later, with a certain self-contradiction, the opposition between belief in God and belief in the "cosmos" is not, and cannot be complete; for, as soon as we say that the "cosmos" is

the ultimate reality, we are at once confronted by exactly the same difficulties which confront the believer in God, and in a form which unreasonably narrows the problem. All the ultimate questions at once arise; and they arise in far greater force, because, if we rule out the supreme attributes which were postulated even in Spencer's philosophy of the Unknowable, we are left with a system which is inadequate to its own self-dependent existence. Any serious attempt to determine what attributes *would* be necessary to such an existence at once leads us into Theistic philosophy; and, so far from taking the mind out of its depth, enables it to recover its own simplicity and integrity by reminding it of its own axioms, and such directly perceived truths as forbid the production of plus out of minus. In fact, the real believer in God never does feel the intellectual difficulty quite as Höffding suggests.

It must be added, moreover, that our own reason will not allow us to halt at what we perceive at once to be an inadequate cause. But it is only in the scientific field of secondary or proximate causes that we get the endless retrogression which troubled the minds of John Stuart Mill and Swinburne. It was against science, not against religion, that they should have brought their indictment, if any indictment were necessary. We do not have to examine every secondary or proximate cause to know that none of them will suffice, any more than we have to examine all possible triangles to know with certainty that in no triangle can you find a centre equidistant from every point on its boundary. There are occasions when

we can safely make the intellectual leap over all particular instances, and need not go "step by step."

We know at once, for instance, that neither Mr. Swinburne nor a lucifer match was the Author of the universe. We have only to ask ourselves what cause *would* be adequate, and our reason at once insists on taking, not a step or two back, but a single leap, as great as the thought of eternity, to the idea of the self-sufficient and uncaused Cause which alone is adequate. The fact that the human mind is capable of so vast a leap is one of its divine credentials. The existence of the universe, and everything in it, rests upon an ultimate impossibility. As we said above, there ought to be nothing at all, yet there is a universe in existence, a great pageant of fleeting phenomena, resting ultimately on a permanent uncaused Cause, with attributes adequate to its own self-sufficiency and to the utterly impossible, yet absolutely certain, existence of the interdependent whole. The dark saying *Credo quia impossibile* thus began to acquire a new and scientific meaning for me. It had originated with one of the profoundest minds of antiquity, yet it had often been taken as a mere defiance of reason or a blind surrender to superstition. It quietly dawned upon me that it was an acknowledgment of the ultimate impossibility which was also the ultimate Fact, inscrutable, but (as Spencer said) more certain than anything else whatsoever; and this acknowledgment was forced upon me also, by my own reason. It was reason that had led me up to this inscrutable Reality of the agnostics, and the attributes assigned to it as absolutely certain by the arch-agnostic in his

chapter on the Unknowable. It was reason that made me see in what St. Augustine called *That which Is*, an impossibility that bowed the head, and forced me to believe (as Spencer believed) that, because it was utterly impossible in nature, and yet absolutely certain in reality, it was rightly called supernatural.



## CHAPTER V

*In the beginning, God made heaven and earth.  
One sentence burned upon the formless dark—  
One perfect phrase of music, like a star  
Seen in a distant sky;  
One sentence, and no more, from that high realm . . .*

*The long-sought consummation of all law,  
Through all this manifold universe, might shine clear  
In those eight words one day; not yet; not yet;  
They would be larger, then;  
Not the glib prelude to a lifeless creed,  
But wide as the unbounded realms of thought,—  
The last great simplification of them all.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH





## CHAPTER V

IT is a curious illustration of the intellectual confusion of our time that science should be commonly regarded as slowly vindicating its own unchanging truth against the slowly succumbing theories of religion.

The real conflict, on the subject of "evolution," was between the older science and the new. The whole body of the orthodox science of the day was on one side, and one or two "daring" younger men on the other.

These facts deserve the very strongest emphasis. Darwin (or his henchman, Huxley) had to fight the whole army of early nineteenth century science for every inch of ground that his theory gained. There was a time when he stood almost alone, facing calumny and the bitterest enmity of the scientific world. His subsequent fame, his very position as one of the pioneers of modern scientific thought, are obviously due to just that conflict. The revolution that he effected in the scientific thought of Europe was what crowned him—not the fact that he succeeded in wearing down the hostility of a few thousand Anglican clergymen. (Incidentally, even the clergymen were not all on one side. Charles Kingsley was a partisan of Darwin long before the majority of Darwin's fellow-scientists, outside the churches, had succumbed.) The truth is obvious as soon as the facts are considered; but there is a common notion at the present day that the fight

was almost entirely between the steadfast front of the light-bringing forces of Science as a gloriously united whole and the innocent little religious fundamentalists who believed that "the fixity of species" was a necessary part of their religious philosophy.

And the confusion goes far deeper than that.

Dr. Gore, in his masterly and admirably documented account of the breakdown of tradition, reminds us that the idea of "the fixity of species" as opposed to that of development or "evolution" was first formulated by men of science themselves at quite a recent date. It actually appears for the first time, not in the Christian fathers or the schoolmen, but as a scientific conclusion of the seventeenth century; and it is to be found, first, in the writings of John Ray (1628-1705), who is called the founder of modern zoology. The growth of the idea in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was due far more to the influence of Milton's account of the Creation in *Paradise Lost* than to *Genesis*. The reading of *Genesis* did not prevent St. Augustine entertaining evolutionary notions about those creatures which "being removed by degrees in time and space, make or undergo beautiful variations." On the other hand, Darwin asserted that in his intercourse with the scientific naturalists of the nineteenth century he "never came across a single one who seemed to doubt the permanence of species."

These men of science were his real opponents. The real warfare was between men like Owen, the exponent of the older science, and Darwin (or Huxley), the exponent of the new. When Bishop Wilberforce went to the famous

Oxford debate, foolish as he may have been, he went escorted by Owen. He was primed with his "facts" by Owen, and he spoke as the universally accepted "science" of his generation and two centuries of scientific dogma had taught him to speak.

The situation was complicated, moreover, by the fact that the truth was not entirely on one side; and that, as in almost every other case in history, those who were eagerly grasping at new truths were almost indifferently dropping certain older truths. This is the constant Nemesis of what we call "progress." Any new or even rediscovered truth is, for the moment, more important to us than what we already possess. Men will die to make a very small discovery; but, when it is made, and securely our own, it falls into its proper place, and is seen to be far less important than some of our former knowledge. The followers of Darwin were right on most of the facts; but, in a vivid American phrase, they tried to "empty out the baby with the bath-water," and, if you remarked upon the value of the baby, they triumphantly pointed to the dirtiness of the soap-suds. Then both sides grew angry, and the defenders of the baby denied that the soap-suds were dirty, and their opponents replied that the baby itself was nothing but a soap-sud, and that probably the whole race of babies originated in a bubble.

Our admiration for Darwin should not make us forget that his opponent Owen was a really great naturalist, and our acceptance of what is really true in Darwin's theory should not be allowed to cancel out the really deeper, though older, truth at the back of Owen's mind

when he said that "organic changes take place in accordance with the laws fixed beforehand by the All-seeing and Almighty Being who has conferred upon the organisms their tendency to transformation." There was nothing in this that was really inconsistent with Darwin's own repudiation of "blind chance," though it might have been stated more subtly, on both sides. Owen, however, made that deadly mistake of denying the undeniable. He was defeated and Bishop Wilberforce went down with him.

All through history, men of science have built their theories on the ruins of other men's theories; and the physical universe, as it appears to the religious thinker, is naturally enough the physical universe depicted by the science of his own age. He is not likely to be in the van of scientific discovery (though there have been exceptions like Copernicus and, in more recent times, the Augustinian monk, Mendel). But if the religious thinker is foolish enough to oppose any real scientific discovery (as distinguished from mere hypothesis), it is almost certainly because he has been taught by the science of his earlier days to hold other scientific theories that are not essential to his religion, but have been the habitual vehicle of his thought. To ask him to change his formula is almost like asking him to learn another language in which to say his prayers, or talk to his children. His emotions are roused, and he says unjustifiable things. But a far more serious wrong is done by the man who forgets how, only a few years earlier, science itself confidently taught and keenly defended those very views which he now describes as

though they had never existed except in the narrow minds of religious bigots.

Ecclesiastical contemporaries—and, for that matter, even scientific contemporaries—of that great canon of the Church, Copernicus, were not unnaturally “pre-Copernican.” We could hardly expect them all to anticipate or even to arrive simultaneously at the conclusions of the greatest astronomer of twenty centuries. But, if they believed what they had been taught by scientific men under the Ptolemaic system, it would hardly justify us in speaking of that system as though the ecclesiastics had created it out of their own narrow and bigoted minds. Long after the death of Copernicus astronomers and philosophers doubted the truth of his conclusions.

Francis Bacon contemptuously rejected Galileo’s assertion of the earth’s movement, and rejected it on no better ground than that it was “against the general opinion of mankind.” It seems possible that he would have rejected Einstein’s assertion that all such conclusions are relative. Yet at the present moment some of Newton’s conclusions are being revised, and we are still so far from the absolute truth about the whole matter that we may say of every human system, till the end of time, “the best in this kind are but shadows.” We may flatter ourselves that we have attained a few final results about a few details of the external universe. We may think it impossible that these can ever be revised. But the boldest prophet may well shrink from a positive assertion that no new theory of the mind and its relations to the external

world can arise—a theory in the light of which every known science may have to be reconstituted from the beginning; while their formulae, with all the scholastically elaborate and mediævally minute speculations of the twentieth century about the trillions of planetary systems that can dance on the point of a needle, may have to be ruthlessly tossed to their own limbo.

But one article of the agnostic creed will still remain unshaken—one article which Herbert Spencer regarded as more certain than anything else whatsoever. At the end of every line of thought the human mind will still be confronted by the Unknowable, Omnipresent, Perfect, Absolute, Uncaused (and therefore Supernatural) Cause of all things; and, in the strength of whatever faculty it may be that enables us to apprehend (though not to comprehend) the certainty of which the arch-agnostic used all those phrases, men of the future will still be able, nay, will still be forced, to retain at least twelve words of the Nicene Creed. Whether those twelve words inevitably lead to more or not, those twelve, at least, are inevitable. I seem to hear as I write them, and hear with certainty, in the dim future, thousands of years hence, the massed choirs and solemn assemblies of a civilization yet unborn, repeating like the distant voice of the unaltering sea, *Credo in unum Deum, factorem coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.*

## CHAPTER VI

*Subtler than music, quieter than light,  
The Power that wrought those changes; and the last  
Were all implied and folded in the first,  
As the gnarled oaktree with its thousand boughs  
Writhing to heaven, and striking its grim roots  
Like monstrous talons into the mountain's heart,  
Is pent in one smooth acorn. So each life  
In little, retold the tale; each separate man  
Was, in himself, all life's epitome,  
Still groping upward, into the unknown realms  
As far beyond us now as Europe lay,  
From the first life that crawled out of the sea.  
There lies our hope; but O, the endless way!  
And the lost road of knowledge, endless, too!*

THE BOOK OF EARTH





## CHAPTER VI

THE practical achievements of science during the nineteenth century were accompanied by disastrously misleading methods of popular exposition. The specialists, "the men who knew more and more about less and less," lured the thought of the world along their diminishing roads until it was almost taken for granted that everything was to be explained by something less than itself, a process which leads to an obviously absurd conclusion and is a direct defiance of the first axioms of all science and all thought.

Popular theories of evolution (we must distinguish, of course, between these and the more philosophical theories) are of the kind that would account for a Beethoven symphony by tracing the pedigree of the wood and catgut in the violins. Every step of the process may be accurate, exquisitely accurate as far as it goes. It merely happens to omit the most important factors in the problem, the music itself, the listener, and, most essential of all, the composer. Analogies are not evidence, but they may sometimes, with perfect accuracy, illuminate the strength or weakness of an argument; and, in this particular analogy, we do at least get a suggestion of "the three articulations of reality," as a Hegelian would call them, the thinking subject (who seems to need an outside world), the object which apart from his thought

seems to vanish altogether, and the sustaining Power in whom they are both embraced.

Darwin's theory, from which most of the popular misapprehensions arose, was exquisitely accurate in its facts, as far as they went, and he followed them with the utmost integrity along his dwindling path until it vanished into lifeless earth and sea, and these in turn were dissolved into the primal nebula. It was his task to follow that one downward and dwindling path, without regard to the fact that all paths go in two directions. If he had turned his face in the opposite direction, he might have caught glimpses of a fuller explanation at the end of the upward road, along which, after all, the race has hitherto ascended. It was not his business to investigate the meaning of the great hint of the greatest of the Greek philosophers—that for explanations we must look to the last term of the series rather than the first, the order of thought being the reverse of the order of nature. But the concentration of the "evolutionists" on their own particular task, and their own long particular line of dwindling facts, to the exclusion of all the other factors that bore upon it in the heights and depths of the sum of things, did have a disastrous effect on the nineteenth century mind and its offspring in the twentieth. In contemporary literature, and the mind of the decivilized world as we know it to-day, "evolution" has been made to mean something that no real thinker could accept for a moment.

At one end of the process we have a nebula, a cloud of gas, drifting about in space; and, out of the action and

reaction of the chemical elements in that cloud of gas, and nothing else whatsoever, the great cities of the world, and all their towering cathedrals, the works of Shakespeare and Beethoven, and the entire human race with its joys and griefs, have emerged.

Or one may begin the process, in imagination, when our planet was lifeless. The reader may imagine himself visiting our planet, at that lifeless stage, and standing on the shore of a lifeless sea. He may imagine himself staring at that lifeless waste of heaving brine, and thinking over his own assurance that, out of chemical changes, and nothing else whatsoever, by a perfectly "natural" process, if he merely waited long enough, one sure and certain day the *Mauretania* would go sailing past, and a newsboy run up to him with a choice of the London journals.

Unless he was peculiarly insensitive to the weirdness of those thought-shattering facts, the visitant would surely be overcome by just that profound sense of the "numinous" which I have described as overwhelming the mind of a child when it first grasped the idea of Being, and realized the inscrutable mystery that anything should be in existence at all. The idea of parthenogenesis on so complete and vast a scale—the conception and production of whole nations by an original cloud of gas—uninfluenced by any higher Power—might make him more tolerant of those religious hypotheses in which at least a more adequate Cause was affirmed. At least, he would understand what Kelvin meant when he said "Science not only affirms, it postulates, creative Power."

It seems necessary to dwell on this very simple aspect of

the matter because there is no doubt at all that the exponents of "evolution" by concentrating attention on their more complicated masses of exquisitely accurate descriptive detail at later stages of the process have obscured the real issue, and that the most important factor in the problem has been omitted altogether.

The attention of the man who reads *The Origin of Species* is absorbed by masterly and perfectly accurate descriptions of the possible ways in which birds or insects acquired their protective colouring, through the "survival of the fittest." He forgets to notice that "natural selection" cannot begin to work until you already have a range from which the selection is to be made.

But one almost hesitates to note this omission, for even this detail may divert the mind from the monstrous fact that, all along the line, by an intellectual conjuring trick, plus has been produced out of minus. The modern world, at the end of the nineteenth century, really believed that this gigantic and intricately organised universe of ours, with all its science, art and religion (true or false), had been born of a lifeless and homogeneous cloud of gas, uninfluenced and uncontrolled by any higher or deeper Power.

Well might Darwin, in *The Descent of Man*, write those words which both his enemies and his friends have forgotten to read:

"This grand sequence of events the mind refuses to accept as the result of blind chance. The understanding revolts from such a conclusion."

Unless one assumed the alternative of a purpose, and a directive Power working through the whole process, the theory of evolution was already beset with difficulties which seemed fatal to it. But the theory (as I believed, and still believe) was true as far as it went. It seemed probable, indeed it seemed certain, that there had been a vast and continuous system of development from a few lower and simpler forms of life. The origin and explanation of this process was an entirely different question, and it is just here that the significant contradictions really begin between the evolutionists themselves. The assumption of a purpose and a directive Power (to which Darwin himself pointed whenever he emerged from physical details to consider the more or less acknowledged functions of Spencer's "Unknowable") would have been inevitable, but for the blind folly of the narrower religious opponents of Darwinism. A Plato or an Aristotle in the religious camp would have transfigured the whole conflict, and compelled the acceptance of the one hypothesis which exactly answered the otherwise insuperable scientific difficulties, and was in perfect accord with the profoundest thought of former ages.

There was the immense initial difficulty, for instance, that made many of the exponents of "Natural Selection" argue in a complete circle—the difficulty that, without an already existing range to select from, the development of varieties by "natural selection" cannot begin. Even scientific minds appeared to think that the unconsciously humorous plea "only a very little one" would suffice to account for the preliminary off-shoots of variety. And if, as

ultimately it must, the problem be referred to Spencer's Supreme Being, there seems to be no adequate ground for declaring that the Supreme Being is debarred, at an early stage of the process, from any further participation in it, especially as its creatures, in the later stages, appear to draw nearer to the realm of eternal values, and to be more and more capable of participation in those very attributes with which the more philosophical agnostics themselves had endowed their Unknowable. To suggest a limitation in time for the influence of the Supreme Being on the history of a particular planet was merely to repeat, under the name of science and philosophy, an earlier religious crudity which one hoped had disappeared for ever, with the similar interpretations of Genesis.

There was the further immense difficulty of supposing that a vast number of more or less independent accidents could co-operate for a single beneficial end; an end which did not become beneficial till vast periods of time had elapsed and could, therefore, have no bearing on any process of "natural selection" or "survival of the fittest."

These "difficulties" had long been admitted. They had long been misused as an argument against a process of development which had undoubtedly taken place. In their right use, they were of immense importance as a clue to the real explanation of evolution; and it was not fully realized how their importance had increased in the light of the more recent results of science. The new argument had to be built up from the old beginning.

The eye, for instance, is undoubtedly a useful organ in its more or less perfected state; but an eye in the making,

and in the earlier stages, before it was capable of vision, was a very different affair. How were we to account for the innumerable slight co-operative changes in nerve and brain structure, all working towards a single beneficent end during those aeons in which no benefit could have been received and no advantage gained? The full wonder of the process is not apparent till we realize the number and intricacy of the events which are required, *not only to happen, but to co-operate* (and, in some cases, simultaneously) from various centres for a single end. It is when one asks what the unifying principle and power must be that one begins to grasp all that Huxley's new teleology might mean.

Even when some elementary power of vision had been acquired (and this comes late in the process, for innumerable preliminary conditions must be prepared in the physical structure, the nervous system and the brain) the development of the more perfect eye from a mere centre of sensation, through a series of happy accidents, is not as simple as it looks in popular expositions of evolution. These happy accidents must coincide in their effects with the untold myriads of other happy accidents which were required to co-operate in the extremely intricate development of the organism as a whole.

It is time that some of the popular respect for the empty spaces and physical magnitudes of astronomy should be diverted towards the creatures that are commonly supposed to be dwarfed into insignificance by that science.

The seventeen thousand tubes in the compound lens of a butterfly's eye are formed and developed in each



individual insect by a co-operative process so complicated that it defies description. It includes all the preliminary arrangements in the egg, caterpillar and chrysalis stage, and the contributory processes whereby food, taken in and digested, is conveyed to build up the intricate structure of the lens, as well as every other part of the organism. The happy accidents, in short, must be adapted not only to the improvement of an optical instrument, but to all those other arrangements of the organism. These must include the remarkable power of reproducing, not only itself, but all the latest "accidental" improvements in its indescribably complicated instruments; for, unless these improvements are transmitted as they are acquired, they disappear. They certainly are acquired. They certainly are transmitted. The argument is not against evolution, but against any easy acceptance of happy accidents as an explanation of a vast and harmonious system of law.

But even if we disregard this system, and take the eye, separately, as a mere optical instrument, we have to remember, first of all, Darwin's own somewhat naïve remark about one of the earlier stages of its development (the italics are mine):

"We have *only* to place the naked extremity of the *optical nerve* at the *right distance from the concentrating apparatus* and an *image* will be formed on it. . . . We may start from an optic nerve simply coated with pigment, the latter sometimes forming a sort of pupil."

*Only!* . . . Quite apart from the fact that the complicated mystery of the *perception* of images as distinguished

from mere sensation is here ignored, it may be remarked that "we" can do nothing of the kind. All the ingenuity of the human intellect has tried to make the blind see for thousands of years, and, with all the advantages of having the rest of the organism intact, we have hitherto been able to supply neither the "pigment" nor the optic nerve, in its simplest form. It is not impossible that, at some future date, with our incalculable advantages over happy accident, we may succeed. But, if so, it will be intelligence that brings it about. In the meantime, the word "only" seems misjudged, and likely to mislead the careless reader as to Darwin's real views, which explicitly rejected happy accident in the last analysis.

Further, it is well to remember, simply as an example of another group of facts, the statement of a former Savilian professor of astronomy on the difficulty of improving such an optical instrument by mere accident. He is not, of course, arguing against the theory of evolution, but against the common omission of the very factor which was postulated in Darwin's protest against a "blind chance" theory:

"Suppose, for instance, one of the surfaces of the crystalline lens of the eye to be accidentally altered, then I say that unless the form of the other surface is *simultaneously* altered in one only way out of millions of possible ways, the eye would not be optically *improved*. An alteration in the two surfaces of the crystalline lens, whether accidental or otherwise, would involve a definite alteration in the form of the cornea,

or in the distance of its surface from the centre of the crystalline lens, in order that the eye may be optically better. All these alterations must be simultaneous and definite in amount, and these definite amounts must co-exist in obedience to an extremely complicated law. To my apprehension then—that so complex an instrument as an eye should undergo a succession of millions of *improvements*, by means of a succession of millions of accidental alterations, is not less improbable than if all the letters in *The Origin of Species* were placed in a box and on being shaken and poured out millions on millions of times should at last come out together in the order in which they occur in that fascinating and, in general, highly philosophical work.

“All this suiting of the succession of circumstances is to go on, not once or twice, but millions on millions of times. If this be so, then not only must there be a Bias in the order of the succession of the circumstances, but so strong a Bias as to remove the whole process from the accidental to the intentional. The Bias implies the existence of a Law, a Mind, a Will. The process becomes one not of Natural Selection but of Selection by an Intelligent Will.”

This coincides with the view of Helmholtz, who has been foolishly quoted (without reference to the context) as the maker of what, I suppose, is now his most famous remark: “If an optician wanted to sell me an instrument which had all these defects, I should think myself quite justified in blaming his carelessness in the strongest terms,

and giving him back his instrument." Even Professor James Ward in his Gifford lectures quotes this remark as if it really represented all that Helmholtz was trying to say.

Reference to the context indisputably shows that Helmholtz was endeavouring to suggest a far more subtle consideration, the very opposite of the conclusion which is usually attributed to him. The whole point of his remark was that, for human purposes, the human eye was far more useful than any optical instrument whatsoever. He explained at length:

"(a) That the eye has great compensating advantages over all other optical instruments, notably in its very large field of vision. The field of view of instruments made by art is usually very small, and becomes smaller with the increased size of the image. . . . The image which we receive by the eye is like a picture, minutely and elaborately finished in the centre, but only roughly sketched in at the borders. But although at each instant we only see a very small part of the field of vision accurately, we see this in combination with what surrounds it, and enough of this outer and larger part of the field to notice any striking object and particularly any change that takes place in it. All of this is unattainable in a telescope.

"(b) That a sensible man will not cut firewood with a razor, and that each step in the elaboration of the eye must have made it more vulnerable. Its perfection is practical, not absolute.

“(c) The adaptation of the eye to its function is, therefore, most complete, and is seen in the very limits which are set to its defects.”

Helmholtz concludes, therefore, that “*the result which may be reached by innumerable generations working under the Darwinian law of inheritance coincides with what the wisest Wisdom may have devised beforehand.*”

This, it must be remembered, is but one minute fragment of the problem, as it is envisaged by a man specially interested in the lens, as an instrument. All the myriads of preceding conditions are already assumed—the centre of sensation, ready to be developed; the nerve-structure; the connection with the brain, which is to receive and *perceive* the synthetic picture; and the mystery, which Huxley found unfathomable, of consciousness itself. And this is not all.

Our specialists, each working along his own line, do not envisage the problem as a whole. It is impossible for them to do so while they are engaged on their own particular task. But it is necessary for the philosopher to regain that central point of view.

When we consider the unity in multiplicity of the whole intricate organism of that creature now endowed with sight, and remember that it must be an organism capable of reproducing itself and all its instruments, optical and otherwise, by union with another equally intricate organism; when we remember (as no biologist can pause to remember) all that the chemists and physicists have told us about the composition of “matter,” and the

astronomical figures of the electrons which, in law-abiding planetary systems, must therefore move to their exact stations in each smallest development of such an organism; when we remember, further, that all these myriads upon myriads of law-abiding units are co-operatively bound in a loftier hierarchy of still more intricate laws to the single end of serving the organism as a whole; when, still further, we remember that, as the eye, brain and nervous structure develop, our "vision" enables us to apprehend those other and higher values of beauty, which again speak to us of a Being intelligible and eternal, as though—in our development—we were once more approaching our own origin and forgotten home; and when, finally, we remember, as neither biologist nor physicist can afford to remember in the face of his own particular task, that, under the scrutiny of the more philosophical science of our own day, "matter" itself is dissolving into the realm of ideas, and that ideas appertain to a Mind; then, surely, the mere notion that this majestic sequence of events is the result of "blind chance" falls below the level of our intuitions (not to speak of our intelligence) and we may indeed confirm and reinforce the declaration of Darwin that "the understanding revolts from such a conclusion."

Darwin, like Huxley, frequently made other statements which had a curiously mixed quality of cold impatience, probably the result of his irritations in controversy.

"How a nerve comes to be sensitive to light," he remarked in *The Origin of Species*, "hardly concerns us more than how life originated."

It was like the deliberate obliteration of all expression from the face of a man who was trying to annoy a theologian. Moreover, nothing could be more misleading from a philosophical point of view. Certainly to-day we should be profoundly interested in an answer to those questions. If he had said that the questions were beyond the scope of science, he might have been justified, though it might fairly be replied that, in such a case, some of his conclusions were premature. But, when he remarked that the question of how life originated did not "concern" him or his theory, he was not doing himself justice, or writing *à sa hauteur*. In view of the great questions that he was actually trying to settle, his attitude is almost as unreasonable as that of the narrower theologians. Moreover, if Darwin meant to imply that science is concerned with process, not with origins, it was an error to call his book *The Origin of Species*. "The Development of Species" would have been accurate, and quite enough. But there was a certain desire to have it both ways; and, when he really emerged from his details and faced the ultimate issue, he took a more comprehensive view. Quite clearly it profoundly affected his own theory, if the whole problem were to be raised above fortuity into the intelligible kingdom of the mind; and the curious conflict and confusion of his thoughts is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in a passage of *The Origin of Species* dealing with the development of the eye:

"We must suppose that there is a power, represented by natural selection, or the survival of the fittest,

always intently watching each slight alteration, and carefully preserving each which tends to produce a distincter image."

And he concludes, in words that again are neither quoted nor remembered by his exponents or his enemies:

"May we not believe that a living optical instrument might thus be formed as superior to one of glass, as the works of the Creator are to those of man?"

On all this various evidence, taken as a whole, there seemed to be only one possible conclusion about the whole process of "evolution." It did not mean the development of something out of nothing. It did not mean the development of plus out of minus. The movement which on this planet has raised life to the threshold of the eternal world of beauty and the highest levels of human thought, must have originated on the highest level of all. It postulated a supreme directive and creative Power, with a purpose, working behind and through the whole evolutionary process.

I will not say that this necessarily, and by itself, confirmed the findings of Nicæa or Chalcedon. But it can certainly be said that it confirmed the remarks of that supposedly complete sceptic, David Hume, who wrote in his *Natural History of Religion* this more than remarkable but constantly forgotten sentence: "The whole frame of Nature bespeaks an intelligent Author; and no rational



inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief for a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism."

This sentence, on the whole, like the statement of Darwin about "blind chance," was the most emphatic sentence of the eighteenth century exponent of philosophic doubt.

## CHAPTER VII

*Out of this earth, this dust,  
Out of this flesh, this blood, this living tomb;  
Out of these cosmic throes of wrath and lust,  
Breaks the lost splendour from the world's blind womb.*

*Courage, O conquering soul!  
For all the boundless night that whelms thee now,  
Though suns and stars into oblivion roll,  
The gods abide, and of their race art thou.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH



## CHAPTER VII

My reading diary tells me that before I went to the University I had read and made many notes on *The Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*, and other expositions of the theory of evolution. I had read them, not as a bookworm, but with a boy's open-air interest in Natural History. They accompanied me, as the poets accompanied me, to a favourite nook of ferns, in a fir-wood, and their faded covers still remember the sunlight. Darwin was one of my heroes (as a section in one of my own later books—*The Torch-bearers*—may testify) and I am not attempting a foolish witticism when I say that for me his writings had (and still have) the simple old-fashioned charm that earlier generations found in the *Natural History of Selborne*, or the honest pages of old Izaak Walton. But, in those early days, there was the additional interest of Darwin's attempt to reconstruct the "grand sequence of events" throughout the universe, and the feeling that he might be able to answer some of the questions that perplexed me. Whatever differences there may have been between the various exponents in detail, I was convinced, as I have already said, that Darwin (and Huxley even more soundly) had annihilated all serious opposition to the theory that higher forms had been evolved from lower forms. I had not the slightest notion that St. Augustine had entertained this theory, or

that the idea of the fixity of species was comparatively modern. But again I was impressed by a fact that neither the supporters nor even the enemies of Darwin appear to have noticed. Darwin, too, in the most emphatic sentence he ever wrote, pointed in the same direction as Huxley, Arnold and Spencer, towards a permanent Reality behind the whole temporal stream of evolution, a Reality upon which the whole process rested as its ultimate ground, or cause; a Reality which, though it might be unknowable, had now another characteristic attributed to it. Darwin was not a trifle with words; he was a man of simple rectitude, who earnestly endeavoured throughout his life to seek truth before all things. He seldom wrote emphatically. He was surely not quibbling when, in his noblest passage, he described the whole pageant and process of evolution through the ages as *that grand sequence of events which our minds refuse to accept as the result of blind chance. "The understanding revolts from such a conclusion."*

Like many of the statements of his fellow-agnostics at that time, it was completely overlooked because the controversialists were furiously concentrating their attention on a thousand minor disputes that seemed of more immediate importance. Mr. Gladstone, for instance, was passionately concerned about Noah's Ark. And now, when the time had come for a calmer survey, there were few who actually read *The Descent of Man*. Later exponents of the theory held the field. "Connoisseurs in revolt," as our contemporary intellectuals may be, they must still be unaware of the revolt of Darwin; for it is never men-

tioned at the present day, even in a whisper; although the new men of science, along their own lines of thought, are more and more adopting the same position.

The conclusion to which Darwin was pointing in that sentence is obvious, although he refused, as a man of science, to go further in that direction. He said once (it is recorded in his biography) that he did not wish to speculate on subjects of this kind, because it seemed to him that the mind of the Creator must be as far above the mind of man, as the mind of Newton was above that of a dog.

This was not a very accurate or a very strong way of stating the real truth. (The distance between Newton and the dog is measurable; the other distance is immeasurable.) The truth had been much better stated by a much older writer: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

The older statement was far more accurate, far more scientific, than that of modern agnosticism, which sometimes talked as if it had a monopoly of precision on such matters, and had actually discovered the profound truth which it so inadequately expressed.

But the value of Darwin's rejection of "blind chance" in the majestic unfolding of the universe and the development of man was not in its weight as an independent statement on an isolated question. It was in its contribution to the one central truth towards which a hundred other statements by his fellow-agnostics all pointed.

"As many arrows loosed several ways,  
Fly to one mark."

Moreover, it was bound up with his acceptance of the reign of law through the universe, and he might, indeed, have found in this the answer to his own suggestion that minor events (the dissemination of seeds, for instance) might not all be under the supreme control which he implied for the major events of the universe.

I began to catch a faint glimmer of the sublime possibility from which he shrank in that unscientific hesitation over the reign of law in "small things." The principle of the uniformity of Nature brought us nearer to a glimpse of the mechanism whereby the sands of the sea might be numbered, and not a sparrow could fall to the ground unheeded. If this ancient and sublime statement were true, the doctrine of the reign of law throughout Nature was not contradictory but complementary to it. As a recent scientific writer on the "experimental approach to religion" has observed, "if the belief is held that God is a God with an all-seeing eye, and with a concern for the smallest and meanest of his creatures, science cannot deny the validity of that belief. Rather it must admit that there is much which it has observed within its own sphere which seems to bear out that belief, and to give it a broader and firmer foundation. Indeed, science must demand that God, if there be a God, should be conceived in terms which include carefulness and concern to the utmost limits."

Mere hypothesis though this conception might be, I began to find it more and more difficult to stop short of it when once I had accepted the various truths which the agnostics themselves had postulated of the Unknowable

and Eternal. The idea of an uncaused supernatural Cause, acting for a purpose, had to be co-ordinated with the idea of a universe ruled in every act and atom by law, and this made it difficult indeed to find any halting place. There was no gulf between that "grand sequence of events" which the mind of Darwin refused to accept as the result of blind chance and the events which Darwin seemed to think might be exempt on the ground of their smallness. Even Shelley was more truly scientific and consistent here, in his belief that

" . . . the one Spirit's plastic stress

Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there  
All new successions to the forms they wear";

and it is odd that a great man of science should have been so misled (even momentarily) by an argument from physical size. The "agnostics" were on the right track when they declared their scientific faith in "law," and asserted that if we knew all the factors we could foretell the course of a wind-driven grain of dust as precisely as we calculate the course of a planet. Huxley went even further than this, though he prefaced his admission of a "wider teleology" by attacking the narrower teleology in phrases so guarded that they might well confuse his readers. "The teleology," he says, "which supposes that the eye, such as we see it in man or one of the higher *vertebrata*, was made *with the precise structure which it exhibits*, for the purpose of enabling the animal which possesses it to see, has undoubtedly received its death-blow." By this method of stating an opinion, with which in its right form



St. Augustine would have agreed, Huxley misleads the reader as to his precise meaning; for he cannot resist getting in his blow at certain theologians who were not his intellectual equals. Few others would have insisted on the "precise structure." All that he meant here was that current misinterpretations of the symbolical language of *Paradise Lost* and its descriptions of the creation were not in accord with the views of evolutionary science. He was discussing the watchmaker theories of Paley; and what Spencer called the "carpenter" theories of creation.

It is difficult to say what Huxley's attitude would have been towards the frank confession of Voltaire, who has been popularly regarded for so long as the very type of the complete sceptic that the enormously important limits of his scepticism have been almost forgotten. Everyone remembers the perfectly just irony in *Candide* with which Voltaire attacks the false teleology, and scoffs at the beneficent arrangement whereby every great town is provided with a river. This is remembered, because it is amusing. But it is usually forgotten that Voltaire also wrote these far more important words:

"To affirm that the eye is not made to see, nor the ear to hear, nor the stomach to digest food, would be the most monstrous absurdity, and the most revolting stupidity that ever beset a human mind. Sceptical as I am, I declare such to be evident madness. . . ."

Reading this one may well understand the remark of Thomas Hardy, in one of his poems, that after listening to a modernist preacher he felt inclined to return to the

pages of "that moderate man, Voltaire." Indeed, in his next paragraph, Voltaire actually used the very analogy that in England is always associated with Paley. It has not the validity as *evidence* that Paley attributed to it; but, as Voltaire uses it, to elucidate his fuller meaning by an illustrative analogy, it is entirely legitimate. There is a certain irony, however, in finding that the Archdeacon Paley of the famous and long demoded *Christian Evidences* is anticipated by Voltaire thus:

"If a clock proves the existence of a clockmaker, and the world does not prove the existence of a Supreme Architect, I consent to be called 'cause finalier,' that is to say, a fool."

Huxley certainly did not mean, as many of his more careless readers might suppose, to suggest that the eye was not made for seeing, or that the purposes for which the eye had been developed through the ages were not included in the intricacies of the whole vast and inter-dependent scheme. For this is how he continues:

"Nevertheless it is necessary to remember that there is a wider teleology, which is not touched by the doctrine of evolution, but is actually based upon the fundamental proposition of evolution. That proposition is, that the whole world, living and not living, is the result of the mutual interaction, according to definite laws, of the forces possessed by the molecules of which the primitive nebulousity of the universe was composed. If this be true, it is no less certain that the existing world lay, potentially, in the cosmic vapour; and that a

sufficient intelligence could, from a knowledge of the properties of the molecules of that vapour, have predicted, say, the state of the fauna in Britain in 1869, with as much certainty as one can say what will happen to the vapour of the breath on a cold winter's day."

Taken by itself, this statement may not carry us very far; but we are forced to co-ordinate it with the statement of another agnostic, of equal scientific eminence, a contemporary of Huxley, and belonging to the same school of thought. Professor Tyndall, writing of this very hypothesis, remarks:

"Strip it naked and you stand face to face with the notion that not alone the more ignoble forms of animalcular or animal life, not alone the nobler forms of the horse and lion, not alone the exquisite and wonderful mechanism of the human body, but that the human mind itself, emotion, intellect, will and all their phenomena—were once latent in a fiery cloud. Surely the mere statement of such a notion is more than a refutation."

It is nothing of the kind. Huxley's statement was perfectly accurate, as far as it went; but Tyndall, for once (also quite rightly), was troubled by a deeper question. He could not trace everything back to a fiery cloud and leave it there, without realizing that the arrangements of that cloud required an adequate Cause. Huxley and Tyndall were not contradicting one another. But their statements required co-ordination.

It is true that Huxley's view of the physical universe

reduced or exalted it to something like a mechanism; but there is no fault to be found with his reasoning, so far as it went. The comparison of this intricate and interdependent frame of things with a machine was made, like all such comparisons, to elucidate the less completely known by a familiar example of a similar kind. The comparison always seemed to me a just and illuminating one. But there is obviously no use in such comparisons if the most essential characteristics are entirely omitted from the familiar example.

Every human machine, as Dr. Streeter reminded us recently, has three characteristics—that it is produced by intelligence, guided by intelligence, and used for a purpose. To omit these three most essential characteristics from our example, therefore, is nullifying the purpose for which we are using it, and obscuring the true nature of that which we are pretending to illustrate. We are comparing the universe with something which does not exist, a chimera bombinating in a vacuum; and we lose the whole value of what would otherwise be a perfectly just comparison, in a perfectly sound elucidatory process.

Huxley did not deny the more important factors. Indeed, he said more than once that he was far more sure of the reality of Mind than of anything else whatsoever. But he did omit the true distinguishing characteristics of all known mechanism.

Tyndall did not affirm those characteristics. He merely said that, lacking them or their equivalent, the mere notion of a physical process whereby he himself and the whole of the Royal Society (not to speak of London,

Paris and New York) had been evolved out of nothing more than a cloud of gas was its own refutation; and this at least left us free to ask what kind of Cause would be adequate to effects so remarkable.

Huxley's statement at least suggested that (whether an adequate Intelligence existed or not, and whether the process were willed and directed or not) the physical conditions did undoubtedly exist in which it would be possible to predict the entire future of the universe from a knowledge of the properties of the molecules in the nebula. The conditions under which omniscience is possible, and the conditions, therefore, under which an all-embracing purpose, and a care extended to the minutest detail are possible, all did exist and were completely fulfilled by the universe around us. According to Huxley, those conditions were actually postulated by modern science.

If then we have Darwin, the very man of science who did most to revolutionize modern ideas of teleology, actually postulating purpose in the "grand sequence" of evolutionary events; and if we have Huxley independently postulating the very conditions through which such a purpose might be fulfilled; then we may at least claim the right to co-ordinate those ideas and say that the declaration of a more profoundly philosophical man of science of their own period was at least a solution of their difficulties.

Lord Kelvin, in 1903, wrote this:

"I cannot say, with regard to the origin of life, that Science neither affirms nor denies creative power. Science positively asserts creative power. . . . Creative

and directive power Science compels us to accept as an article of belief. . . . We are absolutely forced by Science to admit and to believe with absolute confidence in directive power—in an influence other than physical, dynamical, electrical forces. . . . There is nothing between absolute scientific belief in Creative Power and the acceptance of the theory of a fortuitous concourse of atoms.”

All these statements were complementary to one another, though each omitted what the others had said, and their combined result was to make several more clauses in the philosophy of Christendom reasonable and acceptable to the contemporary mind.

It seemed to me that the world had reached a stage when, if we could only co-ordinate, not the discoveries, but the great admissions of contemporary science, something like a new revelation might dawn upon the human intellect; and that it would simply confirm, on a vaster scale, the main conclusions of the old Christian philosophy.

I had the impression of a crowd of brilliant thinkers vainly struggling to effect a contact, which just evaded them, between the loose ends of their various thoughts; and, exactly as a city may be illuminated by bringing two wires into contact, so—it seemed to me—if that other contact could only be effected, the whole universe might be intellectually illuminated, and perhaps transfigured, in the *Civitas Dei*.

Religious controversialists were making a prodigious

blunder when they frantically sought for instances of a hiatus in the order of nature, or tried to remove their faith to regions which science had not yet explored. The real truth was that the men of science had not yet carried their own faith in the universal reign of "law" to all its conclusions. They had found no formula subtle enough to cover the subtler aspects of law, especially in those intellectual and spiritual regions where freedom and law appeared to be interdependent. Cause and effect were not limited to the physical world; and whatever that might be which Darwin had enthroned above chance and endowed with purpose, he recognised that it could only be represented in terms of "mind." Mind was the closest approximation. ('As far above the mind of Newton as the mind of Newton was above that of his dog'). Physical causes were always the effect of some other cause. They were never self-moved, or self-originating. The nearest approach to a self-moved, self-determined and really originating cause in our own experience was the human mind. It was not a perfect example because the human mind was finite and the freedom of the human will is limited; but it offered us our only adumbration of a free and truly original Cause. Raised to perfection, this is what mind and will would be; and, in this sense, as the philosophy of Christendom had discerned long ago, the human mind was made in the image of God. A writer of our own day has remarked that there are values in the universe which point to a supreme Mathematician.

Newton, and he was one of a long line, had already spoken of the supreme Mind as the "great Geometrician"

and the "great Mechanic." Addison's poem on the "spacious firmament" was the recognition of this in eighteenth century literature. Milton had puzzled the unimaginative by the symbolism of his celestial compasses; and Kepler (as he worked out the mathematical harmonies of his astronomical laws) had exclaimed:

"Almighty God,  
These are Thy thoughts, I am thinking after Thee."

The stress laid by Sir James Jeans on a particular kind of thought, and the manifestation of a particular kind of intelligence in the universe was really illuminating so far as it went; but it is not the whole story, and—as he has pointed out—it was not intended to be the whole story.

There are other values in the universe which also postulate their supreme cause. Just as water finds its own level, so we can assert that every height achieved on this side of the veil implies a descent from a maximum height on the other side. "The maximum in any genus," says Aquinas (adopting the argument of his Greek forerunner), "is the cause of everything in that genus."

The crude physical analogy of water finding its level had always illustrated for me the great sentences of the Epistle to the Ephesians:

"Now, that he ascended, what is it, but because he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended above all the heavens *in order that he might fill all things.*"

The idea of this descent, and return home, as one of the great clues to the universal process, had developed



unconsciously and spontaneously in my mind when I tried to express it in a very early poem:

. . . Still He descends  
From heaven. The increasing worlds are still His  
                  throne  
And His creative Calvary and His tomb,  
Through which He sinks, dies, triumphs with each  
                  and all,  
And ascends multitudinous and at one  
With all the hosts of His evolving doom,  
His vast redeeming strife,  
His everlasting life,  
His love, beyond which not one bird, one leaf can fall.

It was an attempt to express ideas which at that time were probably beyond the power of the writer; an attempt to shadow forth, by words and symbols, an eternal creative act and an eternal passion, removed from all local and temporal limitations, and conflicting no longer with the new vision of science, but transfiguring it. In the words "redeeming strife," for instance, there was a groping towards some dimly felt accord between Darwin's evolutionary struggle, the Apostle's universe in travail (the pangs of birth and creation) and the infinite care of the controlling Power as exercised through the completely interdependent organic system of unfailing law, whereby such infinite care and control were made possible, or, at least, in the words of one of the noblest of the ancient prayers, "made reasonable and acceptable" to the human mind.

Later, when I met the Athenian stranger in the tenth book of Plato's *Laws*, I found that he, too, was an old friend, and was ready to explain to me that all things had been fashioned with regard to the whole, so that "the care of all things was made easy" for the "Ruler of the world."

St. Thomas Aquinas would seem to be corroborating Darwin when he says: "We see that things which lack intelligence nevertheless act for an end, not fortuitously but designedly. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence. And this Being we call God."

The interdependent system of the physical world might have a mechanical aspect; but, in the world of life and mind, where spiritual causes operate, we encountered the powers that rule the machine and make it subserve their freedom. There, the will of God was not done blindly. It might even be done for love. On the strange (but not irrational) hypothesis that where the spirit of man excels it comes nearest to the divine Power, the will of man might even aspire to a height where

*La sua voluntade e nostra pace.*

But the reign of law from smallest things up to greatest was the very covenant which made this possible. It was the ladder of man's ascent, the *scala perfectionis*. Even for man, it was the reliability of the system of "natural law" that enabled him to direct and control his own affairs. His freedom and his mastery over the elements depended

on it. It seemed that on these lines, for the first time in history, the old religious faith in the monotheistic rule of the entire universe might almost be regarded as a working scientific hypothesis; and that the ancient affirmation, "Thy law is a lantern unto my feet" was being confirmed in a new way. The fate of the sparrow could only enter into the reckoning under an infinitely perfect and complete organization of the cosmos.

Summing up the conclusions of this chapter, then, we may say that science, in every department, was at least pointing to just that complete organization of the universe and everything in it, from the planetary electrons to the spiral nebulae. It was pointing to just that intricate interdependence which seemed to be the necessary condition of such a purpose as Darwin implied, and of such a providence as Shakespeare affirmed (after a higher authority) in the fall of a sparrow. It was pointing to a system of law so unbroken that even the mind of man could exactly foretell the minute when the eclipsing shadow would creep across the sun ten thousand years hence; and, in this, it was pointing to the very conditions under which the omniscience of a supreme and omnipresent Being became intelligible to our human weakness.

These scientific indications, taken separately, might tell us little more than that the conditions of the religious hypothesis were more perfectly fulfilled by the physical universe than it had been possible to affirm hitherto. But taken all together, and co-ordinated with even the most carefully guarded philosophical statements of the agnostics themselves, they acquired a far greater significance. If

Spencer's ultimate, perfect, supernatural, omnipresent and uncaused Cause constantly sustained that organization of the entire universe which had been so precisely described by Huxley, and if—as Darwin so emphatically affirmed—there was a purpose in the process, then certainly modern science had drawn nearer than it knew to those earlier religious thinkers who—on their own subject—had never been surpassed,—the master-minds of Christendom, from St. Augustine to Pascal.

Indeed we were within sight of a time when the great affirmations of religion might even begin to illuminate some of the problems of science. Inductive reasoning might collaborate with at least a few tentative deductions from the great central affirmations of religious philosophy, and each might throw light on the other. There would be an end to the foolish war declared by thinkers of the calibre of Macaulay between philosophy and science; and the thinkers of the future would write books, not so much to expose the falsehood of their predecessors, as to discover where they were right, and to co-ordinate all their precious and infinitely various fragments of the truth, so far as they could, in the one great design.



## CHAPTER VIII

*Music, that is God's memory, never forgets you.*

*Music, in atom, and star, and the falling leaf,  
Binding all worlds in one, remembers for ever*

*The least light whisper and cry of our joy and grief;  
Chord calling to chord, through swift resurrectional changes,  
From key to key, in the long unbreakable chain . . .*

*All, all that we ever loved, though it sleep in the silence,  
At a touch of the Master shall wake and be music again.*

MUSIC AND MEMORY



## CHAPTER VIII

IF I tried to picture the way in which the vast system of law was actually used by the supreme Power, I found that the analogy of music always illuminated the whole matter.

There is a kinship between mathematics and music. But, as an analogy or diagram of the creative process in the universe, music has the advantage of including both the scientific precision, and the depth and richness of life itself. It always seemed to me that music, being itself a creative art, and at the same time detached from particulars, could analogize and thus elucidate many baffling questions. Its answers could not be taken as evidence, of course, but they might indicate the way in which a problem might be solved. The figurative use of one of its technical terms—"the resolution of discords"—has passed into common speech, but every musician knows that in his most intricate and subtle modulations he is doing something which somehow represents the way in which things may really happen. He is working out the golden mathematics of the process of wisdom whereby all things are ordered from end to end. In his recent Romanes Lecture in the Sheldonian Theatre, Sir Henry Hadow remarked that music was "a form of life miraculously born and spreading through a succession of forms which it had itself created. Its office was not to break



with tradition, but to extend and interpret it, and gradually to shape whatever was of permanent value."

If this be true, we could hardly find a closer analogy than music offers us for the operations of the Spirit which Hegel saw at work in all history. The analogy suggests a possible (indeed the only "reasonable and acceptable") clue to the "purpose" which Darwin found in his "grand sequence" of evolutionary events, "gradually to shape whatever was of permanent value." It gives point to the otherwise meaningless idea of Schopenhauer that "music exhibits the world-will, in its rising and falling, in its elementary and its complicated forms, and reveals to us its secret history, its rebuffs, its struggles and its torments." It illustrates the intuitive creed of Shelley

" . . . He doth bear

His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress

Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there  
All new successions to the forms they wear."

It touches with a universal significance the old legend of the city built to music. It makes us see, with Abt Vogler, how the whole fabric of the universe, and the walls and spires of the City of God, may be willed into being. It throws its own light on that riddle of the philosophers—the emergence of higher values whereby, as Browning put it, "out of three sounds we frame not a fourth sound, but a star." It tells us that behind those sounds there is a finger and "a flash of the Will that can."

It recognizes that the golden discoveries of music, as one chord leads to another in a logical progress along the

road of law, illuminate and help us to interpret the ancient saying of the Word made flesh, *I come not to destroy, but to fulfil.*

On these lines, as far back as I can remember, I used to ask myself how music would deal with some of the questions that baffled ordinary thought; and I carried it far beyond the "resolution of discords." The poets had used this kind of argument by musical illustration a thousand times. Some of Browning's profoundest truths were reached in this way as certainly as Kepler arrived at his astronomical laws by reasoning from the analogy of a law in music. The analogy was not evidence. It merely provided a scheme of general principles which aided him to form a mathematical hypothesis. This was tested later, and found to correspond with the facts. And so, of matters upon which mathematics had nothing to say—sorrow, for instance:

"It sounds often well to let  
One string, when ye play music, keep at fret  
The whole song through."

The merely aesthetic view of the matter expressed in those lines of Swinburne is based on principles that have a wider application. Even as a child I used to wonder what would happen to all the adventure stories if there were no real and terrible risks to be run, and whether pictures could exist if there were no shadows, and the daffodils had to be painted in gold on gold. Later, the question arose as to how we could have the triumphant joy of Beethoven without the tragic despair over which that very triumph

takes place. Music illustrated these necessities of the nature of things as nothing else could for me. It also illustrated the possible ways in which a supreme Composer might use even those necessities to enhance the final victory. Great music can do this, moving from point to point, from key to key, with a logical precision too subtle for mathematics, although in the most scientific sense it is a mathematical progression. It illustrates the resources at the disposal of the supreme Composer, and the way in which the creative end may be willed through an organic system of interdependent laws, each holding good, and binding even the Composer, unless and until it be overruled by a higher law, whereof an infinite hierarchy are at his disposal; so that, in his perfection, freedom and law are reconciled. It left room for all the fugues or wanderings of free spirits; and, while it might make sure, by its own laws, that the Composer's will should eventually be done, it worked by infinitely more subtle ways than the deterministic systems of materialism, or even the mathematical systems of quantitative thought. There was room in the universal symphony for intellectual and spiritual persuasion, as opposed to force and "necessity." All the influences of beauty and goodness, tenderness, and affection, could be exerted through it. Even sin and remorse could play their part; and, when all things else had failed, there was still room in it for the ultimate appeal which is mightier than all compulsion, the appeal of a perfect self-sacrifice, which might awaken love for the Highest at last, and so draw, without compulsion, all those whom the gift of freedom had led astray, back to

their true end, in the heart of their Father and their God.

The necessity indicated in the famous line "we needs must love the highest when we see it," is thus not a necessity that interferes with our freedom in any intelligible sense; but rather a "necessity" that crowns our true freedom by opening the way to its perfect fulfilment. The philosopher throws away his freedom, and the whole of the universe with it, for an idle quibble, if he insists that the gift of sight has subjected him to undue compulsion by enabling him to discover the way out of his prison, and thereby imposing an obvious choice upon him. We can all see his point. Life is short, and the point may be conceded to him, together with a thousand other similar points that philosophers have raised in a thousand volumes during these excessively complicated and analytical days. But we are dealing with what concerns rational human beings. The way of Love is not the way of compulsion or mechanism. Its imperatives, like those of truth, or reason, may be absolute, but they do not imprison, they liberate the spirit within us, which leaps to recognize a reality transcending all its limitations, as the wisdom and spirit of the universe transcend all the caprices of our finite nature.

"Whoso hath felt the spirit of the Highest

Cannot confound or doubt Him or deny;

Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,

Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

Those lines from Myers' great poem on St. Paul represent only the human side of the relation. The

divine side is represented by that tremendous saying in which not only death but necessity and compulsion were for ever swallowed up in the victory of a divine act of self-sacrifice: "I, when I am lifted up, will *draw* all men to Me."

This, it seemed to me, was the true secret of the atonement, which had so often been misunderstood and misrepresented. It was not an expiation by a scape-goat to appease the wrath of God. Nor is the word "propitiation," in its modern sense, adequate. Modern writers have often attacked it in terms which show that they have borrowed their ideas of it from undeveloped minds, and have not even considered the central fact upon which everything turns—that the act is one of self-sacrifice, and that the God who offered it is also the God who received it. They need not go to the Christian philosophy to encounter the philosophical problem which only the conception of the supreme Spirit as Triune can solve. Hegel discovered the necessity in the very nature of the relation between subject and object, and their union in the absolute Reality. But it is enough to say here, that, in the divine atonement, the Sender and the Sent, the Priest and the Victim are one. That is why Nicæa decreed its belief in One who was *Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, consubstantialem Patri*. There may be some profound ethical necessity in the nature of God Himself which exacts a price in suffering from God Himself if the wrong is to be righted without annulling the freedom of His creatures. He may win them, but not compel them. It may be that He must win them by personal sacrifice, not

by indulgence, if those ethical requirements are to be fulfilled. But the motive was perfectly stated nineteen hundred years ago, in terms which completely annul the conception of the scapegoat and the angry Judge: "God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son."



## CHAPTER IX

*This universe  
Exists, and by that one impossible fact  
Declares itself a miracle; postulates  
An infinite Power within itself, a Whole  
Greater than any part, a Unity,  
Implying every attribute of God.  
But men still trace the greater to the less,  
Account for soul with flesh and dreams with dust,  
Forgetting in their manifold world the One,  
In whom for every splendour shining here  
Abides an equal power behind the veil.  
Was the eye contrived by blindly moving atoms,  
Or the still-listening ear fulfilled with music  
By forces without knowledge of sweet sounds?*

WATCHERS OF THE SKY





## CHAPTER IX

THE greater agnostics of the nineteenth century had thus intellectually confirmed those deepest convictions which I had reached by intuition rather than by reason. Moreover, as it seemed to me, the agnostics were logically committed, by their very negations, to yet another clause in the philosophy of Christendom. Herbert Spencer's discourse on the Unknowable, followed the exact line of St. Augustine's reasoning when he heard creature after creature crying "not in us," until he arrived at That which made them all. There was a sense in which the agnostics (as we observed above, in the case of Huxley) had followed the *Via Negativa* of Plotinus; and their refusal to define God was reverential in effect. It seemed to adumbrate more worthily than any array of terms all that was implied in the divine Name. Their agnosticism (so far as it went) agreed with the agnosticism of St. Augustine, when he said with equal emphasis, in his great work *De Trinitate*: "We can know what God is not, but we cannot know what He is."

It seemed to me, therefore, that they were logically committed, by their insistence on this utter inscrutability, to at least one more clause of the philosophy of Christendom. Their Unknowable was transcendent. In other words, they recognized, not only a distinction, but an infinite difference between that uncaused Cause which is

ultimate, self-sufficient, eternal, and all those creatures which are not ultimate, self-sufficient, eternal, but are caused by some other.

This—as Herbert Spencer had made quite clear in his discourse on the Unknowable—was not inconsistent with another answer to another aspect of the problem. It was not inconsistent with the “immanence” of the inscrutable ultimate Cause, which he had described as “omnipresent” and as “manifested through all phenomena.” But, exactly as the philosophy of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas had done, it drew a firm line between what was true and inspiring and what was false and absurd in the ideas of pantheism.

The modern man is not usually an atheist. He is inclined to pantheism; but alligators are discouraging; and he does not always realize how the *philosophia perennis*, by qualifying his own theories, might help him.

Controversies on this subject arise not so much from real disagreement as from misunderstanding the real beliefs of others and the terms in which they are expressed, or from a limitation of the intellectual vision whereby the specialist sees with great sharpness every detail of a certain restricted field, but is unable to co-ordinate his view with other and not less important aspects of the matter. Even though others may also be right, he denies their rightness simply because he is looking in another direction. It is for this reason that the affirmations of men of science are far more to be trusted than their denials.

An amazing instance of this is the work of the arch-

materialist of the nineteenth century, Haeckel, whose *Riddle of the Universe* (with its strange boast that modern science had found the answer) was responsible for much of the popular misunderstanding both of Darwin and the philosophy of religion in this country. On many minds, however, including my own, it had the opposite effect. The foolish boast that the riddle had now been solved, and the ideas of God, freedom and immortality finally destroyed, offered a very crude contrast to the attitude of true agnosticism.

At the same time, like Herbert Spencer, this idol of the materialists, Haeckel, more than once betrayed his unconscious agreement with the fundamental beliefs of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. When I came to examine his work more fully I found him, also, among the unconscious prophets. He came to curse, and he remained to bless; so that I sometimes bent over his pages with wonder and shame at the quick contempt that my inexperience had been ready to pour upon a spirit and intellect so strangely groping out of "the bondage of the elements."

I have called him an "unconscious" prophet, because he was so clearly unacquainted with any other field of thought than his own. He was fond of attributing to religious thinkers the most absurd and childish ideas, and then pointing out the superiority of his own thought which, in some very important cases, was almost a re-statement, in modern terms, of the ancient doctrine of the immanence of God. He had not worked it out, or really envisaged all those difficulties which are met by its

co-ordination in the Christian philosophy with the reasoning which led Spencer, for instance, to re-state the doctrine of the transcendence of God. Oddly enough, too, Haeckel anticipates with merciless irony the kind of theology with which Mr. H. G. Wells and other advanced moderns were to dazzle an innocent world half a century later, and he rejects some of their brightest and most "advanced" suggestions in favour of a theology which (though expressed in materialistic terms) is indistinguishable in many essentials from that of the great intellectual councils of Christendom.

In the first of the following paragraphs, for instance, from Haeckel's *Generelle Morphologie* (Vol. II, Book VIII, Chap. 30), the arch-materialist makes very short work, by anticipation, of the later theology of Mr. Wells, and some other attempts to interpret "evolution" as the work of an experimenting "Life-Force" or self-educating God:

"In the realm of biology (which is still governed by teleology) and especially in the realm of organic morphology, we see the ridiculous arbitrary government of a personal and thoroughly human-like Creator, who vainly wearies himself with endeavouring to create a 'perfect' organism, and constantly rejects the earlier creations of a former age, in that he is continually setting up new and improved editions in their places. We have already shown why we must entirely reject this pitiful idea."

In the second paragraph, curiously enough, he seems almost directly to attack, again by anticipation, the conception of the "Ruling Power" in Thomas Hardy's *Dynasts*:

"It is, in fact," says Haeckel, "a degradation of the pure God-idea. This God is a stage-manager, who directs the earth like a great puppet-play, and generally knows how to handle with tolerable skill the numerous threads by which he manages the hearts of men; he is a half-deprived king who only rules over the inorganic realm conditionally, and according to firmly fixed laws; rules on the other hand over the organic realm absolutely as patriarchal land-father and, in this domain, allows himself to be led into a daily alteration of his world-plan by the wishes and prayers of his own children, among whom the most perfect vertebrates are those principally favoured."

All this has an obvious bearing on the groping God of the *Dynasts* who moves human beings like "jack-a-clocks," and offers us, at the end of the drama, the faint hope that as a result of human protests "consciousness" will one day inform "the Will," and lead it to fashion "all things fair," which means (we must suppose) more in accordance with the ideas of jack-a-clocks. Those ideas being (*ex hypothesi*) merely mechanical, Hardy's philosophy seemed to be a hopeless muddle.

Haeckel's demolition of two of his own disciples by anticipation was accompanied by a remark which may be supposed to be aimed at the less intelligent, "who degrade

God Himself into an aerial vertebrate," though it hits only the "ignorant nursery-maid" from whom—as an Anglican bishop remarked recently—some of our "intellectuals" appear to gather their ideas of contemporary religious thought.

We need look no further than the Confessions to discover how far St. Augustine was from regarding his God as an "aerial vertebrate"; and, also, how far behind he had left even the very common idea of both the lower and the higher pantheism among our moderns that God somehow pervades the universe as "water might pervade a sponge."

In fact, it would be difficult to find a more exact parallel to the views of St. Augustine, in many essentials of his creed, than the view which Haeckel proceeded to expound as his own final and considered belief. It is unfortunate that this glowing *Credo* of Haeckel occurred in a book too elaborate for the wide popularity accorded to the pamphlet so often seen on railway bookstalls:

"Our cosmology knows only one sole God and this almighty God rules the whole of Nature without exception. We contemplate his operation in all phenomena of every description. To it the whole inorganic material world is subject, and so too the whole world of organization. If each body *in vacuo* falls fifteen feet in the first second; if three atoms of oxygen to one of sulphur always produce sulphuric acid; if the angle which one columnar surface of rock crystal makes with the neighbouring one is always  $120^{\circ}$ ; then *these phenomena are the*

*immediate operations of God, equally with the blossoms of plants, the movements of animals, the thoughts of Mankind. We all exist by God's grace; the stone as well as the water, the radiolarion as well as the pine-tree; the gorilla as much as the Emperor of China."*

It is supposed that the "materialistic pantheism" of Haeckel identifies God with the universe; but, although Haeckel uses every device of thought and language to complete that identification, he cannot avoid making almost as complete a distinction between them as St. Augustine made. The truth breaks through his language at every turn. What he calls the Ruler is distinguished from the ruled. There is no possible escape from this conclusion.

But it soon becomes clear that, like most pantheists, Haeckel has never discovered his own meaning, and never thought his own theories out. In the paragraph quoted above he affirms that we all exist by "God's grace," and so he already makes a distinction between ourselves who depend on that grace and the God upon whom that very grace depends. Then in the very next paragraph, the full meaning of which has somewhat surprisingly escaped attention, there happens one of the most startling and dramatic things in the philosophy of the nineteenth century. The set, stony face of the arch-materialist is illuminated; his voice changes; its note deepens; and, ambiguous and muddled as he seems in many instances, he begins to speak, like a new prophet, of the living God whom he set out to destroy. This is what he says:



*"This cosmology which contemplates God's spirit and power in all natural phenomena is alone worthy of His all-comprehensive greatness; only when we refer all forces and all phenomena of movement, all forms and properties of matter, to God, as the Author of all things, do we attain to that human intuition of God, and veneration of God, which really befits his immeasurable greatness. For 'in Him we live and move and have our being.' "*

Thus the philosophy of Nature becomes in fact theology. Goethe had said: "Certainly there is no more beautiful worship of God than that which arises from communion with Nature in our own breasts," and Haeckel continues:

"God is almighty; he is the sole Author, the prime Cause of all things; that is, in other words, God is the universal causal Law. God is absolutely perfect; He can never act otherwise than perfectly rightly, therefore He can never act arbitrarily or freely; that is to say, God is Necessity. God is the sum of all forces; so also, therefore, of all matter. Every conception of God which separates Him from matter opposes to Him a sum of forces which are not of divine Nature; every such conception leads to amphitheism, consequently to polytheism.

"Since monism demonstrates the unity of the whole of Nature, it proves, likewise, that only one God exists, and that this God manifests Himself in the collective phenomena of Nature. Since monism generates the collective phenomena of organic and inorganic Nature in the universal causal Law, and displays them as the

effects of 'active causes,' it shows, at the same time, that God is the necessary Cause of all things and is the Law itself. Since monism acknowledges no other beside the divine forces in Nature, since it recognizes all laws of Nature as divine, it raises itself to the greatest and most elevated conception of which man, as the most perfect of all animals, is capable, to the conception of the unity of God and Nature."

Here and there, the oracle (as though hampered by the limitations of the human instrument) is ambiguous; but the ambiguity is nearly always due to the terminology of a writer whose life-work has been confined to a single field. It is a phenomenon that may be noticed in a greater or less degree in almost every one. The old soldier will use military terms on the most unmilitary subjects; and if we could pin Haeckel down to a definition or explanation of the terms he uses, there would be very little difference between his creed, *as far as it goes*, and the creed of the Apostle whom he quotes at the end of the italicized paragraph. Nobody who will take the trouble to examine the whole passage carefully and apply a certain test can escape one very remarkable conclusion. If we eliminate from the passage all that Haeckel (like Huxley in another case) had unconsciously carried over from the religion he was rejecting, or even if we merely eliminate from the passage the idea of a living personal God, there is nothing left that has the slightest meaning. The whole passage collapses at once into an incoherent muddle. The experiment is easily made. Let any honest and careful reader

take half an hour and make it, and no further demonstration will be necessary of the fact that ambiguity and confusion creep into Haeckel's reasoning in exact proportion to its departure from the great philosophy of Christendom in which the difficulties of his theory had been infinitely more thoroughly examined and met. In the italicized paragraph quoted above, for instance, there is no difference whatsoever between him and the great apostle whose answer to the agnostics of Athens Haeckel quotes with such earnest conviction at the end of that paragraph. In the second sentence of the next paragraph he becomes ambiguous; for, if the whole of Nature exists only by God's grace, as he has already informed us, he distinguishes between God and Nature, and it seems that we should worship God rather than Nature, even though we admit that communion with Him *through* Nature, which is His manifestation, may be our best means of worship. Distinctions of this kind are absolutely necessary to thought itself. But if this be what Haeckel intended to say, we are bound to admit that the apostle to whom he turned for the perfect expression of his own thought in the preceding paragraph might have given him the perfect formula for his thought in the second; for there is no possible comparison between Haeckel's loose and obscure phrasing about "the worship of Nature" and the intellectual depth and clarity of the apostle's great sentence: "*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.*" The only materialist I ever met who went so far as to say that he did not believe

in the existence of anything invisible, imponderable and non-measurable (he was an exceedingly young student) was nevertheless quite certain of the existence of his own thought, which he was unable to weigh, measure, or see. Haeckel, of course, repudiated the charge of "materialism" as unjust; and, in fact, the meaning of the charge depends entirely on what we mean by "matter." Haeckel could not escape the charge if he insisted on subordinating all the higher "values" or tracing them back to the Protozoa in such a way that the general reader of his more popular works was led to believe that plus had been evolved out of minus all along the line. Nevertheless, if the later men of science are right, in their resolution of what used to be called "matter" into centres of force, Haeckel may also have been right in the less widely known contention of his more important work that he might just as well have been called an idealist. These centres of "force" are not "material" in the old sense of the word, and if they are created and sustained, or dependent in the last analysis upon the ultimate Cause, or Prime Mover, and that Cause be akin to Mind or Will (the nearest analogy in our experience to a self-moving, self-originated Cause) the confused intention of Haeckel (who was a biological specialist, and had never realised his own philosophical implications) becomes clearer.

Further, the very faith of men like Haeckel in the reign of law throughout the universe has its own unconscious implications, and rests, perhaps, upon something deeper than their discursive reasoning powers. They can examine so very small a portion of the cosmos; yet they are prepared

to draw inferences, with the utmost confidence, as to matters utterly beyond observation, simply because of their faith in the universal reign of law. As one of the noblest and profoundest of the long line of Scottish philosophers—Dr. Fraser—once reminded us, “our assumption of physical order and the general stability of things is without reason when moral and religious faith in the universal Power is withdrawn. Without this deeper faith the temporal process may be supposed at any time to subside into chaos, *in the innumerable contingencies of agencies out of the reach of our physical experiments*; so the root of all merely physical experiments may itself turn out to be a broken reed, as far as only sensuous intelligence reveals it.” Even the agnostic naturalist, in what he calls his “scientific verification” is thus expressing “an unconfessed moral faith” that his scientific intelligence will not be put to confusion when it shows trust in the ruling principle of the universe. In practice, if not in theory, he regards the universe as a manifestation of the Logos, not as ultimately dependent on “a fortuitous concourse of atoms.” He trusts in this, as the Psalmist trusted that he would never be “put to confusion” in the law of God; and indeed the modern conception of “the reign of law” owes far more than has ever been acknowledged to the sublime Hebrew monotheism which brought the entire cosmos, from the falling sparrow to the starry heavens, under one sovereign and steadfast control.

In dealing with Haeckel, we might dismiss all the preceding philosophers of the Middle Ages and of anti-

quity who, notwithstanding their differences, and their diverse ways of approach, had contributed to this one conclusion. We might dismiss everything that the slowly developing philosophy of Christendom had contributed to the subject through its greatest intellectual representatives. We might dismiss the affirmation of Lord Bacon, the alleged "Father of Modern Science", (again the most emphatic affirmation ever made by its particular author): "I had rather believe all the fables in the Legend and the Talmud and the Alcoran than that this universal frame is without a mind . . . for while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them and go no farther; but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity."\* But, though we ignore all this as antiquated, there seems to be no adequate reason for ignoring the conclusion of Haeckel's far greater predecessor, Newton. It was Newton who, by his revelation of the uniformity of law throughout the astronomical universe, was the real begetter of Haeckel's monism. Newton had simply made it possible for Haeckel to exist as a natural philosopher; and certainly, as Pasteur averred, nothing had been discovered in the interval to invalidate the great conclusion of the *Principia*. As in so many other modern instances, it was not the discovery of a new set of facts, but a temperamental change, a mere change of mood, that made all the difference between the ambiguities of Haeckel's attempt to "rest in secondary causes" and the great clear sentences in which Newton,

\*Spencer says exactly the same thing (v. page 36).

at the end of the *Principia*, rises above all secondary causes, and enunciates a truer monism than that of Haeckel by a far more profound reference of all things to One:

"The whole diversity of natural things," says Newton, "can have arisen from nothing but the ideas and the will of one necessarily existing Being, who is always and everywhere God Supreme, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, absolutely perfect."

And this again is, beyond question, the most strongly expressed sentence to be found anywhere in its author's works. It is at least a remarkable fact that, if Newton happened to be right, his conclusion at once gave a real meaning (otherwise completely lacking) to Huxley's equally emphatic sentence about the ethical requirements of the "Eterna", and Darwin's equally emphatic revolt against "blind chance" in the "grand sequence" of evolutionary events.

## CHAPTER X

*What is all science then  
But pure religion, seeking everywhere  
The true commandments, and through many forms  
The eternal Power that binds all worlds in one?  
It is man's age-long struggle to draw near  
His Maker, learn His thoughts, discern His law—  
A boundless task, in whose infinitude,  
As in the unfolding light and law of love,  
Abides our hope, and our eternal joy.*

WATCHERS OF THE SKY





## CHAPTER X

ONE or two indications may be given here of the points at which (departing from the more comprehensive philosophy of Christendom) the specialism of Haeckel loses its way. He accepts an "Author of all things." But

(a) The Author of all things can hardly be identical with the things of which He is the Author. We need not go to the metaphysicians to demonstrate this. The argument of the greatest of the agnostics—Herbert Spencer—has already been given. It is conclusive on this point; and, if this point be conceded, it makes an end of the materialistic pantheism with which Haeckel is popularly connected. The idea of the immanence or indwelling of God as it has been developed in the organic structure of the Christian philosophy belongs to a far higher order of thought than the pantheism of Emerson's *Brahma*:

"If the red slayer think he slays  
Or if the slain think he is slain,  
They know not well the subtle ways  
I keep and pass and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;  
Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
The vanished gods not less appear;  
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;  
When me they fly, I am the wings;  
I am the doubter and the doubt,  
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,  
And pine in vain the Sacred Seven;  
But thou, meek lover of the good!  
Find me, and turn thy back on heaven."

The contradiction here is obvious enough. If good and ill are alike to the Supreme, the last line but one is meaningless, and Andrew Lang's parody would be justified:

"I am the batsman and the bat,  
I am the bowler and the ball,  
The umpire, the pavilion cat,  
The roller, pitch and stumps and all."

But it would be a mistake to dismiss the philosophy of Haeckel, or of Emerson in his *Brahma*, or of the *Upanishad*, upon which Emerson based his *Brahma*, as though they bore no relation to the truth we are all seeking. They are indications, pointers, sign-posts, giving the direction in which one of the greatest of all truths is to be found. They are all striving after one of the greatest of truths; and they fail only as the child fails who stretches out his hands indifferently, for his silver christening-cup or for the moon, because his vision of the world is not yet organized into grades and distinctions, proportions and perspectives, values and hierarchies of value. The pan-

theism that identifies God with Nature assumes a new aspect when we have satisfied ourselves that an elephant, for instance, does not contain more of God than the physically smaller Socrates; and if, by any chance, we begin to suspect that there may be actually more of God's grace in the spirit of the latter, and in the things of the spirit generally, we are at once forced to conclusions which, when they are elaborated and organized, are indistinguishable in all essentials from those which were elaborated and organized in the majestic philosophy of Christendom. The obvious difficulties, the almost comic difficulties, of both Haeckel's and Emerson's "pantheism" were consecutively faced in that philosophy. All that was true in pantheism was accepted, and the development of religious thought on this matter followed the very lines which Spencer laid down for the evolutionary process in general. It was a movement from incoherent homogeneity to the coherent and organic heterogeneity of a higher order of thought, in which—to begin with—there was a distinction between the Cause and its effects, the Author and His works. Differentiation, the production of distinct individuals, seemed, indeed, to be almost the chief aim of the process. And so, in the more highly developed philosophy, God was neither the mutton-chop, nor the fat man eating it. The coherent, though highly differentiated, philosophy of Christendom might not yet have incorporated the latest theories of Science (especially in cases where Science herself had not yet definitely made up her mind), but it had certainly gone far more profoundly into this particular religious problem of the relation of

God to Nature than any individual philosopher had been able to go. The idea of the spiritual omnipresence of God, who is not all things, but the ultimate Being in whom all others originated, creates no gulf in the universe, whether we regard Him as organic with His creation or not. It establishes a higher monism, and offers one more instance, among countless thousands, of the fact that the higher philosophy proves itself by the light it gives rather than by the light it receives.

(b) If it is true, as Haeckel says, that God "can never act otherwise than perfectly rightly," this at once involves a moral law; and, certainly, so far as it goes, it is in perfect agreement with the philosophy of Christendom. But, if there be a moral law, and if there be any ground whatsoever for distinguishing between right and wrong, Haeckel's God cannot be responsible for a wrong. We are, therefore, either forced to say that, in the crudest sense, "whatever is, is right," in which case our distinction between right and wrong falls to the ground, and the word "right" loses its meaning; or we must qualify our pantheism in exactly the same way as the philosophy of Christendom found it necessary to qualify the pantheism of former ages, by attributing, for instance, a certain responsibility and freedom to man. Christianity here, also, definitely proved its worth by the light it gave, and it met and answered clearly and fully just those difficulties which led Haeckel into evasions, ambiguities and intellectual confusion.

(c) It is true that, in view of these qualifications, God cannot act arbitrarily. Haeckel tells us, explicitly, that

this is because God is bound by the perfection of His own nature to act perfectly, and without self-contradiction. But it is merely a verbal quibble to identify this law of perfection with any blind mechanical necessity, or with the *ἀνάγκη* of the Greeks. The freedom of a finite personality, for instance, grows in exact proportion to its reasoning capacity, and its power to act upon principles of reason, which are universally valid, rather than upon blind physical and mechanical impulses. In exact proportion as this power grows its control of its environment grows. We can set no limits to this process. It is not unreasonable, therefore to suppose that the supreme control may be vested in a supreme Mind to which all the mechanism of the universe is subordinate. If we deny freedom to such a Mind, we deprive the word "freedom" of all meaning. Here again a great phrase of the philosophy of Christendom reconciles the two extremes and solves the difficulty. Every regulator of the traffic knows from practical experience that there is a law upon which all freedom to move depends; and the principle thus illustrated on a small scale reigns throughout the universe. It is the principle of the great rhythms of Nature, the movement of the tides and the stars; and it is the principle of the spiritual law "whose service is perfect freedom." In that one brief phrase, the apparently contradictory factors of Haeckel's problem—freedom and law—are reconciled, co-ordinated, organized into harmony; and, where we had intellectual chaos, we have intellectual cosmos.

It is along the road of law, in the sense indicated above,

that the individual transcends his own limitations. The analogy of the "road," indeed, excellently illustrates a hundred ways in which freedom is sub-served by law. Roads are restrictions, in one sense, but a traveller wandering at large through a wilderness or a primæval forest, may be glad to come upon a whole system of such restricted ways if he desires to reach a definite goal of his own choosing. We can attach no other meaning to "freedom." If the road is as broad as the wilderness it might as well not be there. It may very well "lead to destruction." Our control of nature, so far as it goes, is entirely dependent on our knowledge of the laws of nature, and our ability to use that knowledge; and, with every increase in control, we increase our freedom in that particular realm. "I am the Way" was the saying of One who came "not to destroy, but to fulfil the Law" in its perfection throughout the whole universe; and to deliver the spirit of man from the "bondage of this death." In the laws of reason, which are the same for all men, and must hold good everywhere, the human mind is delivered from individual caprice. This is the justification of our human laws in making a man's responsibility depend upon his sanity. The real freedom of his will depends upon it. The man who recognizes any moral imperative, even if (as in the case of a completely materialistic agnostic like the late W. K. Clifford) it be no more than the maintenance of what he himself calls "sacred," his own scientific integrity, his absolute refusal to concede a single point to religion of which he is not overwhelmingly convinced, on rationalistic grounds,—he, too, unconsciously, is on his way to God,

freedom and immortality. Caprice, worldly advantage, the lust of the flesh and the pride of the eye might or might not have power upon him in other ways, but they had no power to make him break that law; and, in its service, he is not altogether of this world. He has escaped from the "bondage of the elements" into an eternal realm. Rather than that the "elements" should defeat his purpose or conquer his scientific integrity, he would die, and so prove the freedom of his spirit.

He was never actually put to the test; but we may accept his word for it; and it is implied in everything that he wrote. Even in the silent implication he touches those ultimates in which men see God. W. K. Clifford himself called the scientific ethics, by which he lived, "sacred." I know of nothing "sacred" in mechanism. Neither the correctness of a clock, nor the regularities of a mechanomorphic universe could fill the mere word "sacred" with the fire and passion which it acquires on the lips of the materialistic W. K. Clifford. Anything that is implied in it, conscious or unconscious, may be added, therefore, to the other concessions made by the agnostics. By itself, it may not mean very much; but it is interesting to know that, in the world of Haeckel and W. K. Clifford, there was room for "God's grace," and a profoundly emotional use of the adjective "sacred," a phrase and a word which, if we eliminate the value carried over from the religion they denied, meant absolutely nothing.

But they did mean something; and those values, therefore, could not be eliminated.

If Clifford and Haeckel contradicted themselves, they



at least offered us another illustration of the great saying already quoted that the evidences of religion are more in the light that it gives than in the light that it receives. Volumes, libraries of volumes, couched in the most abstruse terms, have been written on the ancient philosophical problem of the relation of freedom to law; while, in a few phrases of the philosophy of Christendom, the whole subject is flooded with light.

There seemed to be no question whatever about this. Again and again, after laboriously working my own way out of the tangled modern discussions of these ancient problems I came upon glimpses of open sky, like gaps in a great wood, and found that the clear light came from the intelligible and lucid realms of the Christian philosophy. It came, often, in the very simplest phrases and sentences; but, behind them, as I realized more and more from the writings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, there were depths and heights in which the sublimest philosophy that the human mind had ever known could spread its eagle-pinions.

It was yet one more proof of the dangers of specialism that the great answers to our modern problems, and the light that could be thrown upon them at every turn by the *philosophia perennis*, were not merely ignored, but utterly unknown to the majority of the modern theorists. An imposing recent work by three men of science, really eminent in their own sphere, remarked of the fourteenth century: "About this time, Thomas Aquinas was composing his famous *Imitation of Christ*." One cannot help wondering what they would have said if a theolo-

gian, or a mere man of letters, had written: "About this time, Roger Bacon made the famous remark *Cogito ergo sum*, and began to compose *The Advancement of Learning*." The specialist of the present day can hardly be expected to cover very much more than the immense mass of complicated and analytical detail which his own subject offers him; but this is one more reason for thinking that subjects which profoundly concern the whole man require another kind of treatment. The advancement of knowledge in one direction does not necessarily mean that we have added to our knowledge as a whole. The human mind is so constituted that, when it acquires a new truth, it sometimes drops, not only an old error, but an old truth.

There is surely no other explanation of the fact that both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas bring out all the difficulties of Haeckel's pantheism (difficulties of which Haeckel, many centuries afterwards, appears to be unaware); and that the two older philosophers, with exquisite precision, where Haeckel was crudely groping, state the whole case in perfect form, making clear distinctions where Haeckel obscured them, and drawing, at every turn, cosmos out of chaos.

The terminology of the older thinkers may not be ours, and there may be pages which are of little interest to readers of the present day; but, if we consider the following passage from Aquinas (with its remarkably modern statement about "action at a distance"), it must be admitted that the light it throws upon Haeckel's problem is not to be ignored. It actually considers several aspects of

the problem which had completely escaped Haeckel's attention. On this matter, therefore, the earlier thinker is more comprehensive than the later; and, if his consideration of the problem and the factors involved be more complete, more precise, and incomparably more subtle than Haeckel's, it would be mere folly to treat his solution of the problem as utterly negligible.

"God is in all things," he says, "not indeed as part of their essence, nor as an accident; but as an agent is present to that upon which it works. . . . Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect; as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated.—*No action of an agent, however powerful it may be, acts at a distance, except through a medium. But it belongs to the infinite power of God that He acts immediately in all things. Hence nothing is distant from Him, as if it could be without God in itself. But things are said to be distant from God by their unlikeness to Him in nature or grace; as also He is above all by the excellence of His own nature.*"

If this passage be set side by side with the passage quoted above from Haeckel it will be seen at once how it illuminates the difficulties that have already been suggested in Haeckel's pantheism, yet how it also clarifies and confirms the deeper truth after which he was groping.

It may not answer every difficulty; but it does at least rid us of the pantheistical nightmare in which evil as well as good is a manifestation of God. Moreover, when Aquinas uses phrases like "nature" and "grace" it is at least demonstrable that he knows exactly what he means; while it is equally certain that Haeckel, in the passage quoted above, was using them in a confused manner, and had not really thought his meaning out. If a man tells me that there are two roads ahead of me, and that one is apparently broader than the other at the outset, though, a little further on, it becomes rougher and narrower, and finally impassable owing to a land-slide, while the other road, though narrower at the outset, becomes wider as you proceed, and is perfectly sound all the way, he makes more impression upon me than a man who has never heard of the land-slide or any other of the difficulties aforesaid, is entirely unacquainted with the second road, and merely tells me that the first road lies ahead of me, and that it is my only road. A little later, when I actually come upon the two roads, I am still more inclined to believe in my first adviser; and, if I am of an experimental turn, and discover that there are indeed difficulties around the corner of the first road, and that a mile or two ahead there are signs of a land-slide, my common-sense will force me to the conclusion that the man who was aware of them is more reliable than the man who was unaware of them. The knowledge of the former is obviously more highly organized, even though the latter may have taken specimens of the dust from the very road subjected them to the most searching chemical analysis

and classified the results, with microscopic illustrations of all their animalculae, in a thousand volumes. The simplest signpost on the wayside may be more important to me if I am for a distant City; and if, by any chance, it be the Eternal City, there may be signs by the wayside with arms outstretched that speak without words.

## CHAPTER XI

*Colours and forms of earth and heaven, you flow  
Like clouds around a star—the streaming robe  
Of an eternal Splendour. Let the law  
Of Beauty, in your rhythmic folds, by night  
And day, through all the universe, reveal  
The way of the unseen Mover to these eyes.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH



## CHAPTER XI

It has been said that every one capable of philosophic thought about the nature of things must occasionally have doubted the existence of what is commonly called "the material world." Long before I read Berkeley, at the age of nineteen, I had wondered and puzzled about the suggestion, made more vividly and perhaps even more philosophically by Lewis Carroll than by Shakespeare, that the whole world might be a kind of dream.

I used to wonder whether my own impressions of colour might not be extremely different from those of my neighbours; and this riddle, as we have seen, can never be solved, since our names for them are the same in any case. Still more often did I lie awake, puzzling over the very simple question around which so many thousands of volumes have been written. Colour, like all my other impressions of the outside world, was a sensation of my own. It was caused by something outside me; but it was a sensation, and—as I put it to myself—nothing could be more different from an external object than a sensation within my own consciousness. It was the same, of course, with all the other impressions, though it was easier to realize this in the case of colour, light and sound. If there were no eyes or ears in the universe—as perhaps there would not be after a few more æons—it was obvious that the illuminated and sounding characteristics of the world



would have vanished completely. The something that had caused sound and light when there were ears and eyes to co-operate with it or act as receivers, would still be there. I might picture blind waves or particles rippling and streaming through boundless darkness and silence, but that was all. I might picture the universe as a blind maelstrom of electrons revolving in darkness, but the illuminated and many-coloured pictures of the world which the human senses and the human mind had co-operated to create would have vanished for ever.

It was just here, and just when I needed it, that I began to read Berkeley; and, as the cogency of his great argument dawned upon me, I remember striking the table with my fist in my excitement and exultation, half expecting the colour and resistance of that object to yield like air. But I knew that this was as unfair to Berkeley's argument as Dr. Johnson's attempted refutation of it by kicking at a stone; and I was not surprised at the resistance, of which Berkeley had given his own account, though Johnson had either not read it or had misunderstood it. For Johnson's disproof, I thought, would have been equally valid if he had applied it to the more modern theories of matter, and had kicked a stone to prove that it was not an electrical phenomenon.

My exultation was due to another cause. Whatever else were true or false, Berkeley had delivered me for ever from the prison of nineteenth century materialism; and I realized my deliverance with a gasp of joy. The stone walls had released me, and through the iron gates I saw the intelligible world again, shining and new, like

the spiritual City of the Apocalypse. I felt that Mill and Huxley and Darwin, in spite of their great contributions to the cause of truth, had illegitimately fettered the human spirit to an iron ring in a narrow cell, in order to monopolize its attention.

They had shut their eyes to a greater part, both of the truth and the mystery, than was permissible. The veil of phenomena was more visionary than they had allowed.

At the same time, Huxley and others of his school had made brief admissions here and there which went as far as Berkeley himself could have wished. Huxley, for instance, agreed that he was far more sure of the existence of mind than of matter. The trouble was that, having made the admission, the agnostics of the nineteenth century seemed to think they could forget about it and talk as if it had not been made. Later men of science, however, have not been able to overlook this false departmentalism of thought, in which the theoretical idealism of Spenlow was overruled by the practical materialism of Jorkins.

The extent to which, on the merely physical side, recent scientific theories may be taken as confirming the idealism of Berkeley, has escaped general notice. The solid world of nineteenth century materialism has dissolved under the scrutiny of science into "centres of force."

"We must no longer think of the universe as consisting of solid pieces of matter which persist in time, and move about in space . . ."

Is it Berkeley or Sir James Jeans that is speaking?

"It is possible to conjecture, with Leibnitz, that matter as ordinarily understood, the matter of solid objects and hard particles, has no existence in reality, and only appears to exist through our observing non-material things in a confused way—through the bias of our human spectacles."

Is this a superstitious medievalist, defending himself against the charge of "worshipping a bit of bread" by juggling with the ideas of "substance" and "accident"? A few years ago it might have been thought so; but the sentences are taken from *The New Background of Science*, by Sir James Jeans, who continues thus:

"A piece of matter becomes, in Bertrand Russell's words, 'not a persistent thing with varying states, but a system of inter-related events. The old solidity is gone, and with it the characteristics that, to the materialist, made matter seem more real than fleeting thoughts'."

It is hardly necessary to dwell upon the way in which all this fits into the philosophy of religion, or how perfectly it confirms what innumerable philosophers have said, for thousands of years, about the universe, or "Nature," as an expression of the thought of God. Berkeley had endeavoured to formulate it in a philosophical scheme; but my own mind had long accepted flying gleams and intuitions of it, and taken their truth for granted, as naturally and spontaneously as I might have accepted a

direct vision of the "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe." They had so constantly visited me in those unexpected and quite uncontrollable mental processes from which (in some cases, or perhaps I should say in other cases) poetry is born; they had become so valuable to me as a means of interpretation; they offered so many clues to so many riddles; they were so constantly in accord with the conclusions of so many diverse minds, not only in the field of creative literature, but among the great contemplatives of all races and times, that I could hardly doubt their essential truth.

It was they, and not I, that were responsible for lines which tried to express the delight of the mind in that divine intercourse, through Nature, with God:

"If I could whisper you all I know,"  
Said the Old Fool in the wood,  
"You'd never say that 'green leaves grow.'  
You'd say, 'Ah, what a happy mood  
The Master must be in to-day,  
To think such thoughts.'  
That's what you'd say."

"If I could whisper you all I've heard,"  
Said the Old Fool in the fern,  
"You'd never say 'the song of a bird.'  
You'd say 'I'll listen, and p'raps I'll learn  
One word of His joy as He passed this way,  
One syllable more.'  
That's what you'd say."

It is obvious how perfectly all this fits into and confirms the view of a modern theologian and really profound thinker like the late Dr. Gore:

"The formulas for which the Church contended," he wrote, "were: (a) that God created all that came into being . . . as against the current Greek idea that God was eternally confronted with a co-eternal 'matter' upon which all that He could do was to super-induce 'form.' Now that matter appears to be resolvable into force, and force for a believer in God appears to be simply the putting out of His will . . . the danger from the idea of a formless matter co-eternal with God no longer exists."

In this conception of a universe willed into existence by a Power of which our best and only image is a living, purposive Mind, science and philosophical idealism seem to be approaching each other from opposite poles of thought. A new physical confirmation has been given to the prophetic lines of Shakespeare, a confirmation whereby they, too, become more intelligible for us:

"The great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded  
Leave not a rack behind."

They have been mouthed by thousands to whom they were only sounding words. To-day we seem almost to see the intelligible laws whereby, if the power were withdrawn, the visionary universe might vanish, as the light goes out

in a room. The ultimate reality, as Shakespeare foretold us, is a spiritual one. "These our actors *were* all spirits." This phrase seems to show that, like Huxley, Shakespeare was more certain of the reality of "mind," of which his experience was direct, than of anything else in the universe; and it looks to-day as though all these various thinkers, by different roads, were approaching a single mighty Truth.

Poetry, for centuries, had expressed it in its own language. Dante, in his vision of the Love that moves the sun and the other stars; Shelley, in his vision of "that Light whose smile kindles the universe"; and Wordsworth, in his sense of something "far more deeply interfused,"

"A Spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought"

were all concerned with different aspects of that same unknowable, supernatural, perfect and omnipresent uncaused Cause of all things, postulated by Spencer as more certain than anything else whatsoever; postulated by Huxley, from another point of view, in his statement of the ethical requirements of his "Eternal"; and postulated by Darwin in his affirmation of purpose in the evolutionary process, and his attribution of that purpose to a Mind infinitely transcending all the intellectual powers of man.

The deep saying of Coleridge,

"We receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live,"

represents only one side of the mental process which sustains and creates the many-coloured world of human experience. There is a very profound sense in which the world, as we see it and know it, exists only for the mind of man. But a certain co-operation is necessary between the mind that receives the impressions of the senses and the Supreme Mind. The receiving mind, the mind that focuses its various impressions into unity, the mind that makes its interpretative synthesis, and sees the colour and form of a flower, the expression of a face, the beauty of a landscape, or the significant purpose in a "grand sequence of events" is not a passive recipient. It is actually necessary to the existence of all our organized perceptions. At the same time it could not make its intellectual synthesis on this side, if arrangements had not been made to that end on the other side.

The vision of the world in which we live may be likened to a dream which we all share; a dream that is actually created by our own minds in co-operation with an unknown cause outside us; a persistent cause to which it bears a constant relation. The constancy of this relation differentiates the vision from other dreams, and makes us feel that we can trust it. It is true that our own sensations and impressions remain our own sensations and impressions, but this does not condemn us to solipsism, or a life of illusion. As we have already observed, there is a profound sense in which we are far nearer to reality in the coloured picture-world of a child's normal vision than in the abstract atomic maelstrom into which scientific analysis dissolves the picture. The nearest analogy that

we can find for our real position is the co-operation between two personalities in the exchange of ideas. The language, the symbols, the hieroglyphs they use must be agreed upon; they must be constant; they must have a certain relation to reality, though they be as different from that reality as an algebraic formula from a cathedral, or music from the cat-gut of a violin. Through this medium minds are able to communicate thought, though the minds themselves are invisible. Beauty of character becomes apparent; secrets of the spirit are revealed; and, though neither one can pluck out the heart of the other's mystery, they affirm their knowledge and even their love of one another. Each receives, and each transmits, through a medium which is different from both, and bears no resemblance to them.

Thus, when John Stuart Mill re-affirmed (as Huxley also re-affirmed) one of the most widely accepted conclusions of the older philosophy—"I do not believe that the real externality to us of anything, except other minds, is capable of proof"—he was drawing nearer to a deeper truth than he imagined. For if it be true (as Sir James Jeans puts it) that animals exist whose senses are very different from our own; and that the world, therefore, "seems very different to them"; and, if it be true that we, too, with other senses and a more perfect intellectual equipment might again see the world very differently; then we are forced to yet one more conclusion in accord with those of the master-minds of Christendom. The worlds of all these creatures are diverse, and only relatively real. But the reality, with all those permanent



values which only exist for Mind, must exist somewhere; and, if it does not fully exist in our imperfect minds, its home must be in that Perfect Mind, wherein "we live and move and have our being."

As Dr. Gore puts it:

"The reality of an ordered world can exist only for mind and in terms of mind. There seems to be no way of escaping this conclusion. The real world of a fly or a dog—whatever it may be—requires the mind of a fly or a dog for its existence. The man's world of fuller reality requires the man's mind. The whole of the world-reality in all its fullness and complexity postulates a universal and perfect mind, which (whether it is to be represented as its Creator or its Soul) must be instinctively called divine. And it is this divine mind which is communicating with me through all the processes of sensitive experience. In knowing more about the world I am learning about God."

## CHAPTER XII

*Tell me, Merlin, tell me why  
These delicate things that feast on flowers,  
Red admiral, brown fritillary,  
Sister the flowers, yet sail the sky,  
Frail ships that cut their cables, but still fly  
The colours we know them by . . .*

*Where each repeats the glory of its neighbour,  
In the same pattern, with the same delight,  
As if, without the artists' labour,  
The palette of rich Chaos and old Night  
Threw off a myriad pictures, every line  
True to the lost Designer's lost design.*

THE RIDDLES OF MERLIN



## CHAPTER XII

THE foregoing considerations throw their own light on one aspect of "evolution." There was, in Nature, one particular kind of beauty to which, it always seemed to me, philosophers had not given the attention it deserved. They had dealt with the abstract principle of beauty. They had dealt with the organic beauty of art, and with that wild beauty of Nature which transfuses the universe like a light—the soul of the picture—

"That Light whose smile kindles the universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move."

But this beauty of Nature, in wave and cloud and tree, was undefinable, uncapturable, fleeting as a spirit. There was, however, another and perhaps a less exalted kind of beauty in Nature; that beauty of definite pattern which we find, for instance, on the reverse side of the wings of the common blue butterfly, and the upper side of the wings of the peacock butterfly, or the silver fritillary. The glorious mathematics underlying their symmetries of colour were not evanescent like those of the drifting cloud or the breaking wave. Their patterns could be examined at leisure as we examine a work of art; and their exquisitely elaborate designs (this last word is in every sense the *mot juste*) had always seemed to me beyond the scope of blind causes, and infinitely mysterious by very reason of

their artistic intelligibility. For their schemes were what all artists would understand by the phrase "intellectual schemes." As I tried to suggest in a book written some years ago, the utilitarian explanation of Darwin that this particular kind of beauty had been developed through long ages of sex-selection seemed utterly inadequate:

"He only saw

The blaze of colour, the flash that lured the eye.  
He did not see the exquisite pattern there,  
The diamonded fans of the under-wing  
Inlaid with intricate harmonies of design;  
The delicate little octagons of pearl,  
The moons like infinitesimal fairy flowers,  
The lozenges of gold, and grey and blue,  
All ordered in an intellectual scheme,  
Where form to form responded, and faint lights  
Echoed faint lights, and shadowy fringes ran  
Like elfin curtains on a silvery thread,  
Shadow replying to shadow through the whole."

When I pored over them as a boy, in the first days of a "collection," this aspect of their beauty sometimes startled me; and even now, when I see their unmolested wings opening at my feet, I feel the old awe stealing over me.

The human mind is so apt to take some of these apparently insignificant things for granted, that even observers of high intelligence may hardly realize the amazing character of this elaborate beauty of pattern, especially if they are thinking of apparently more important matters. Again and again, when their attention

has been seriously drawn to it, I have seen them catch their breath with astonishment. It consists not merely in the exquisite symmetrical arrangement of the little lozenges of colour, as in some intricate mosaic, or infinitely delicate tapestry (for the very comparison takes the bloom off the picture). It consists also in the absolute perfection of the colour harmonies themselves, and the loveliness of their gradations, the ethereal shading of one into another, combined with the perfection of definite form which makes them, in contrast to the beauty of a sunset sky, for instance, a little organized cosmos, directly comparable (though to our own disadvantage) with the intellectual designs of human artists.

Darwin's theory that this intricate beauty had been "acquired" through ages of sex-selection, "the more beautiful males having been continually preferred by the females," seemed not only inadequate but—for once—blundering and obtuse. It was, of course, quite reasonable to suppose that a brilliant flash of colour might serve as a sexual attraction between insects. Among creatures considerably higher in the scale of life we know what hideous displays of crude colour have served the same purpose. But it was unreasonable to suppose that, in choosing their mates upon the wing (as butterflies always do) and a wildly fluttering wing at that, the butterfly wooers would be seriously influenced by exquisitely delicate approximations to a single, exact, formal, artistic design among the innumerable possible arrangements of thousands of minute flecks of colour. The colours were by no means all "gorgeous" as Darwin suggests.

Many of them are of the most ethereal and subdued tones, and the patterns have the formal perfection of an intellectual scheme. They have no loose ends; they are worked out to the last minute detail in the artistic correspondence of a point here to a point there, and the curve in a line here to a curve in a line there, while every detail fits perfectly into the scheme as a whole; for each design has a real unity.

The lovely pattern on a butterfly's wing is, in fact, a perfect example of that beauty which—as philosophers have told us for ages—depends upon order, arrangement, unity in variety, proportion, harmony and just that mutual relationship of parts which distinguishes cosmos from chaos. But all this requires a mind capable of perceiving and appreciating it; for the æsthetic pleasure which it gives can only arise when these mutual relationships are recognized and contemplated. We can hardly suppose that Jane, the Painted Lady, preferred the fluttering Robert to the fluttering William because Robert had a minute moon with a slightly more delicately shaded halo on one wing, and this arrangement corresponded more precisely to a similar moon and its halo on the opposite wing. If we can accept this, we can hardly suppose that generation after generation of butterflies would adopt exactly the same criterion until those minute moons were at last perfectly placed in the exact positions æsthetically required by an elaborate pattern, every other minute detail of which had to be worked out in the same way with a unanimous critical fervour, until the long and intricate picture was finished in that perfect

unity whose relationship no insect is likely to perceive at all. Yet Darwin rejected, absolutely, all doctrines that suggested the creation of beauty for the sake of beauty, "to delight man or his Maker." "Such doctrines, if true," he said, "would be absolutely fatal to my theory."

This invitation to observe the heel of Achilles was followed by a series of remarks on the nature of beauty which were demonstrably untrue, and were either directly or by implication contradicted by himself in other sections of the same chapter. In one crucial case, which is recorded in his biography, they were proved by direct experiment to be untrue—an experiment with bits of paper which at least demonstrated that the æsthetic faculties of butterflies could hardly be delicately susceptible to those patterns and harmonies of beauty which stir the human observer, and that the preferences of butterflies must be grounded on far more elementary factors.

Every line of Darwin's explanation was marked by the slow, honest, confusion of the specialist who confessed that, by the very nature of his work, even the masterpieces of human art had gradually been robbed of all significance for him. His argument was that of a specialist who had strayed into an unfamiliar field; and, although on his title-page he acknowledges the scientific debt of the evolutionary theory to Goethe, he displays, for his own part, a real lack of that wider culture of the mind which—in former ages—enabled the worker in one intellectual field to grasp general principles, and, through those principles, to understand the "best that was known and thought in the world" on subjects other than his



own, where those subjects were of vital importance to his philosophy of life. There was every indication, indeed, that Darwin was completely unacquainted with the long philosophical history of the "Beautiful." But his argument was intensely interesting, as one of the first systematic attempts to follow the "dwindling road" on this particular subject, and explain beauty away on materialistic grounds. If it could be explained on those grounds I was anxious to learn; for, on one side of my mind, I distrusted abstractions; and, whatever mysteries there might be beyond the facts of beauty, the facts must come first as the foundation of our reasoning. Moreover, there were facts to be considered here with which artists are perhaps better acquainted than most men of science, facts upon which minds equally realistic, but of a very different character from that of Darwin, might have something of importance to say.

Commenting on the protests of certain naturalists against his utilitarian theory of beauty, Darwin had remarked: "They believe that many structures have been created for the sake of beauty, to delight man or the Creator (but this latter point is beyond the scope of scientific discussion): *Such doctrines, if true, would be absolutely fatal to my theory.*"

He goes on to assert that, in such cases as a butterfly's wing, beauty has actually been evolved for beauty's sake, but that the delight of the insects in one another, not the delight of man or the Creator, is the origin and end of that beauty. (He contradicts himself slightly here; for while he admits that the beauty must have been an end in

itself, he also suggests that it is merely a sexual adjunct. We will not pause to consider the less obvious beauty of pattern in certain flower-petals, or—if complications of fertilization by insects arise even there—the lovely design of certain ferns, or the leaves of the mimosa, where no such complications arise, and there can hardly be any more question of sexual causes than in the beauty of a sunset sky.)

It would be easy enough to avoid the issue by pointing to other examples of natural beauty, a pine-tree on a mountain ridge, or a cloud drifting across the moon; but we have a more definite ground before us in those instances of pattern, finished and beautiful pattern—the wings of the butterfly—which Darwin himself had chosen. These patterns had always interested and puzzled me, and I wanted to avoid being misled by poetical or metaphysical abstractions.

The very first thing to be observed, however, was that Darwin himself took this very course of confusing the issue: "*I may first remark,*" he said, "*that the sense of beauty obviously depends on the nature of the mind, irrespective of any real quality in the admired object.*"

And here, at once, with all our butterflies, we are plunged into the depths of metaphysics. He is right, of course; but a little quiet consideration will show the dangers that now threaten his theory concerning the development of an admired object which, irrespective of any qualities in itself, is to affect not only the minds of butterflies (if they have any) but the very different minds of men with a sense of its exquisite beauty. Darwin

had already pointed out that even human tastes differed—particularly with regard to beauty in women—and that certain tribes of men might admire what Darwin would regard as repulsively ugly. The ape, whom Darwin regarded as considerably nearer to man than the butterfly, was content to display his blue posterior patch for precisely the same purpose as Darwin affirmed that the exquisite patterns on a butterfly's wing had been developed; and we can only suppose, therefore, that the mind of the butterfly is considerably nearer to that of Shelley than the mind of the ape. But how are we to explain the fact that man himself can appreciate this beauty, as a whole, only where he has reached a certain high level of development. Is there a mind for which all such beauty exists even before insects or men have attained the level at which they can appreciate it? And if this beauty is for the delight of butterflies, and not of men, how are we to account for the fact that man is the only creature on earth who can possibly grasp and appreciate the unity in multiplicity upon which the beauty of the design depends?\* We may leave out of account the question whether the insect sees anything like what man sees. It is possible, it is even probable, that what attracts the butterfly may be as different from what attracts the man as the drone of a bee from the music of Mozart. But the aphorism of Bacon in the *Novum Organum* that "the subtlety of Nature far exceeds the subtlety of the human senses and intellect" is certainly true of this

\*The utilitarian philosopher should be the first to feel the force of this argument.

beauty. How then can it be the result of any finite critical faculties, insect or human?

"We may infer," says Darwin, "that a nearly similar taste for beautiful colours runs through a large part of the animal kingdom." In other words, assuming his theory to be true, this must follow. It is a very complete circle and begs the question very neatly. The resultant generalization may or may not be within the scope of science. The red that attracts the Red Admiral's lady appears to have a very different effect upon (a) the bull, and (b) the student of Titian. But, in any case, the beauty we are considering is not mere vividness of colour. Beauty involves far more than that, and Darwin here seems to be utterly unaware of it.

If the sense of beauty "depends on the nature of the mind," the "beauty for beauty's sake" which the mind of man perceives, not merely in the colours, but in the colour systems, on the wings of a butterfly, is hardly to be explained by the sexual preferences of an insect's mind. We have already suggested that what the man perceives may be as different from what the butterfly perceives as the music of Mozart from the drone of a bee; but, in any case, there can hardly be any question whatsoever that the beauty perceived by man is of a far higher order than that perceived by the insect. How comes it, then, that the beauty of this far higher order is to be regarded as a mere by-product of the lower order? It is as though we were to say that the music of Mozart were for the delight of the vibrating strings and not for the delight of the composer or the human listener. For

it is precisely this beauty of the higher order, the beauty perceived by man, that Darwin sets out to explain. He plunges so far into idealism as to assert that this glorious beauty perceived by man is "irrespective of any real quality in the object." What the insect actually perceives Darwin has no means of knowing. Its perceptions may consist of very elementary sensations. They probably do. Yet he insists that his whole theory of evolution stands or falls by his assertion that the origin and end of the glorious beauty perceived by man on the patterned wing are summed up in the sexual functions of the insect, whose perceptions are admittedly of an entirely lower order. It is not reasonable. It is not even common-sense. It is almost tantamount to saying that some of the most exquisite perceptions of the human mind (for it is *these* and these alone that Darwin is trying to explain) were developed not for the delight of their Creator or their possessor, but for the delight of an insect that knows nothing whatsoever about them.

What then are we to make of this strange reasoning, reasoning which, on certain occasions, does almost justify the statement of a quiet contemporary philosopher, who refused to be rushed into hasty acceptance of new theories, that *The Origin of Species* was one of the most illogical books ever written? We are not to conclude that Darwin's theory of evolution is untrue. What we are to conclude is that he constantly omitted one absolutely essential factor—the factor of the supreme creative Power at work through the whole process. But Darwin lived at a time when agnosticism, under great provocation, developed a certain obscu-

rantism of its own. He was one of the sincerest and noblest characters of the nineteenth century, a man whose intellectual integrity was of the heroic order; and yet, like some of his fellow agnostics, he did, under foolish and often ignorant attack, develop one real moral defect. It appears, under a disguised form, in a brief sentence, quoted above, on the Creator. ("But this lies beyond the scope of Science.") He was perfectly right, of course. It did lie beyond the scope of Science; but it did not lie beyond the scope of the question which he wished not only to discuss, but also finally to decide, without any reservations whatsoever. The fact that the Creator is beyond scientific discussion does not justify the agnostic in an assumption that scientific theories contain the whole truth. Like the remark of Huxley (quoted in another connexion) it betrays the irritation of a man who has been annoyed by narrow-minded theologians, and, despite its show of cold scientific indifference, it masks a defect which we never find in his greater predecessor—Isaac Newton.

There are many of these brief remarks among Darwin's contemporaries, and they all go to the tune of "with that we are not concerned," or "in this we are not interested." The justice of the remarks, from a scientific point of view is often defensible; but it is the kind of justice which makes counsel on one side feel that the judge is "dead against him" before his case has been heard. And on the question of beauty, which in its ultimate perfection is one of the attributes of God, the tone was not altogether defensible. Nor was Darwin blind to all that was at

stake on the apparently trivial ground that he had chosen. He was to stand or fall by it; and, though much of his theory may remain, and the evolutionary principle be established, he will inevitably fall—as time goes on—to the second rank among the great pioneers of science, definitely below such figures as Copernicus and Newton.

Newton would not have regarded with coldness or impatience the divine implication in Hegel's definition of beauty; nor, if he had thought it necessary to investigate the nature of beauty, would he have treated the only adequate explanation of some of its aspects as though it were irrelevant to all of its aspects. The inadequacy of Darwin's attitude is generally recognized to-day, among the more philosophical men of science; but the consequences have not yet dawned upon the contemporary mind. Hegel, a far subtler exponent of evolution than Darwin, had affirmed that beauty was nothing more or less than the Spiritual manifesting itself sensuously. If there be anything in Theism at all, even so vague a Theism as that of Spencer, nothing could be more reasonable than that, in the evolution of the universe by the Will of God, the order and arrangement of its unfolding should bear the intelligible characteristics and reflect the beauty of the supreme Mind in which it all originated. Often, these characteristics are beyond our grasp. We should have to see much more to realize their unity in beauty. This is where Art, with its power to select and synthesize, comes to our aid, so that the unseen idea is suggested through the visible world. But, here and there, within a natural framework, as on these radiant

wings, we catch direct glimpses of it, too. Nothing could be more likely than that the visible effects of a spiritual Cause should reveal, even to our narrow vision, occasional harmonies, occasional glimpses of the beauty which is one of the eternal attributes.

We have here at least an adequate explanation as to how those harmonies came to exist before the advent of man; and also as to how the mind of man can receive impressions of intellectual beauty from objects which are not themselves intellectual. If the creative Power, as Shelley described it, moves through the dull dense world,

“ . . . compelling there  
All new successions to the forms they wear,”

we have some light upon the fact that in natural beauty on the sublime scale, as in the perfection of the smallest flower, man seems to recognize something akin to his own highest faculties, and receives a silent communication from the unseen world. We understand what Hegel meant when he said that the Divine is the centre of all the manifestations of Art; and what Wordsworth meant when he speaks of seeing into the life of things through the power of harmony, or when he tells us of the spiritual presence he felt in

“ . . . all the mighty world  
Of eye and ear—both what they half create  
And what perceive.”

In all this there is simply one great consilience of



thought, illuminating and confirming the great saying of St. Paul that the invisible things of God are known by the things which are made. Rightly co-ordinated with what was true in Darwin's theory it illuminates that also, and removes a thousand contradictions, including that constant difficulty of the materialist, the difficulty at every stage of getting plus out of minus.

Whatever the "purpose" of evolution might be, the revelation of those harmonies might coincide with the purpose: it might even be a part of our education, an indirect preparation of our minds for other glories which we have not yet apprehended. Here and there we caught a phrase or two of the universal symphony. Elsewhere the design or pattern might escape us by its very grandeur; and this, perhaps, was another good reason for choosing the apparently trivial instance of a butterfly's wing. As Mr. Kipling says:

" 'Heaven is beautiful, Earth is ugly,'

The three-dimensioned preacher saith;

So we must not look where the snail and the slug lie

For Psyche's birth . . . and that is our death."

But, having observed the birth of Psyche on this small scale, we could turn with more confidence to the less definable beauty of Nature, on the large scale. Hegel's theory of beauty was by no means irreconcilable with what was true in Darwin's theory. Indeed it supplied the missing factors which alone could make it intelligible. Yet Darwin, obsessed with his idea of "natural selection" as an explanation of every development in the life-

process, rejected all doctrines that suggested the development of beauty for the sake of beauty, to delight the only minds that could fully appreciate it. Those doctrines would not have been in the least fatal to his theory if he had not already made the fatal mistake of trying to extract plus from minus, and omitting the essential factor in his own problem, the omnipresent operation of the Cause of all things—the ultimate creative Power. He underestimated the real strength of his theory, as he also misunderstood the profound truths upon which it depended for its ultimate intelligibility. He insisted, with the utmost emphasis, that the grand sequence of events, astronomical, geological and biological, was not due to blind chance. He constantly implied a supreme purpose in the process, “unknowable” though it might be. There was obviously no *a priori* ground, therefore, for denying that the purpose of the whole creation, in its utilitarian aspects, as well as in its beauty, may have been the joy of its Maker, the possessor of that “purpose.” If there be a Maker, it seems reasonable that this should have been the purpose, and unreasonable that it should have been otherwise. Looked at from this point of view, we at least got some explanation of the fact that “beauty” so often appears to be a special grace, something over and above what we had any right to expect of a merely mechanical world. “In the very act of labouring as a machine,” says J. B. Mozley, in his magnificent discourse on Nature, “she also sleeps as a picture. . . . Take a gorgeous sunset; what is the substance of it? Only a combination of atmospheric laws and

laws of light and heat. . . . These laws go on employing themselves on plain hard work till we become suddenly alive to their throwing off, in this working, a magnificent spectacle, as if by some happy luck. . . . When the materialist has exhausted himself in efforts to explain utility in nature, it would appear to be the peculiar office of beauty to rise up as a confounding and baffling *extra*. Physical science goes back and back into nature, but it is the aspect and front of nature which gives the challenge, and it is a challenge which no backward train of physical causes can meet."

The mystery can be explained, however, if we suppose that the bond of union between beauty and use is in their common ultimate Source. A house may be usefully designed. The same house may also be beautifully designed. The usefulness might have been there without the beauty and *vice versa*. The real bond between the use and the beauty is the mind of the architect, and there is no *a priori* ground for denying that the beauty may have been created for his own delight, as well as for the delight of any other mind that could understand his own. And this, too, is in perfect accord with the great philosophy of Christendom, both as it was developed in the Platonism of St. Augustine and the Aristotelianism of St. Thomas Aquinas. Behind the creation on one side is the God who, unknowable in His own essence, yet reveals himself through the visible order of the cosmos, and in a special manner through that beauty which is itself a quiet universal language. On the other side are the minds of men, to whom that quiet language speaks of His per-

fection, and brings them into communion with it. If this were true, moreover, we should have a perfect explanation of what constitutes a very great difficulty to Darwin's theory, the fact that—as he asserts himself—“the sense of beauty depends on the nature of the mind, irrespective of any real quality in the object.”

The real values must be somewhere. They cannot be only in the mind of the butterfly. *Ex hypothesi* they are not only in the mind of man. Whence are they communicated, then, if not from that which enfolds us all—

“That Beauty in which all things work and move”?



## CHAPTER XIII

*Here on earth*

*The mind of man is like a little mirror,  
Reflecting what it faces, and no more.  
Carry it up the intellectual heights  
And it will show you parables, one by one,  
In crag and pine and cloud. The wayside flower  
Will float within it, and the mountain-eagle  
Gyre through its midget sky. It will reveal  
A dark earth-cleaving valley, a snowy peak  
Up-towering; each a fragment. The blind frame  
Of man's own mind shuts out the whence and why.  
Letters and words we read, not sentences  
Of the world's volume . . . single hieroglyphs,  
Not the vast epic of the eternal hills,  
Like armies of archangels thundering home  
Into the mind of God.*

THE LAST VOYAGE



## CHAPTER XIII

PHILOSOPHERS and prophets have told us that, if there were no veil before our eyes, all human activities would be paralysed. The modern poet who wrote

“A veil twixt us and Thee, dread Lord,  
A veil twixt us and Thee  
Lest we should hear too clear, too clear  
And unto madness see”

was only elaborating the ancient affirmation “No man can look upon God’s face and live.” If by any chance this world were a place of gradual education where a process of soul-making was being carried on, it is obvious how much would be gained by beginning at the beginning and working up through every grade of the difficult ascent, learning all its laws by experience at first hand, and assimilating what we had learnt into the very fabric of our life. We could learn nothing of the real system which we had to make our own if—at the outset—we were stunned and overwhelmed by the vision of the sum of things.

But contemporary civilization, with its specialisms, and its mechanized triumphs, its more and more vivid superficial distractions and the increasing speed of its physical movement, was beginning to mistake its own blindness for a proof that nothing existed beyond it. Its members



were increasingly unaware of the real nature even of the world immediately around them. They knew a considerable number of scientific facts, but the portentous nature of those facts made less impression on them than the headlines in a daily paper. I felt that someone ought occasionally to remind the confident speaker at a political meeting that we were all in a very precarious position. We were being hurled through space, on a revolving ball, at the rate of a thousand miles a minute, and if, at any moment, we met (as millions of other celestial bodies have met) some obscure and derelict wreck from another solar system, our economic prosperity would concern us no more, and it would be quite impossible for him to "explore an avenue" or apply an "acid test" again.

We might not expect a cataclysm any more than one would expect a train-disaster in travelling through the Swiss mountains. Like children, we might take trains for granted. But there were obviously important aspects of the journey which would be missed by a traveller who buried his nose in a newspaper and never even thought of looking out of the window. Not for us was that rapture of a former generation:

"Purple and crimson and scarlet, like the curtains of God's tabernacle, the rejoicing trees sank into the valley, every leaf, as it turned to transmit the sunbeam, first a torch and then an emerald."

The modern world was not alive to the tremendous Reality that encompassed it. We were surrounded by an immeasurable abyss of darkness and splendour. We built

our empires on a pellet of dust revolving round a ball of fire in unfathomable Space. Life, that Sphinx, with the human face and the body of a brute, asked us new riddles every hour. Matter itself was dissolving, under the scrutiny of Science; and yet, in our daily lives, we were becoming a race of somnambulists, whose very breathing, in train and bus and car, was timed to the movement of the wheels; and the more perfectly, and even alertly, we clicked through our automatic affairs on the surface of things, the more complete was our insensibility to the utterly inscrutable mystery that anything should be in existence at all.

Like spoiled children, we did not appreciate customary gifts, even though they were bestowed on us by stranger powers than were dreamed of in the Arabian Nights. The fruits of Aladdin's orchard were only precious stones. Ours were alive and we took them for granted. If it had been ordained that Spring should visit us with her leaves and flowers for only one short week in a thousand years, the world would wait for her approaching loveliness as it has never waited for emperor or king. We should look upon her opening buds as though the heavens were indeed up-breaking through the earth. Millions would be profoundly moved then as hitherto only the few have been moved—by the miracle of beauty. We should walk in wonder and awe—religious awe—through our fields and woods; and an apple-bough in blossom would seem to us, then, the amazing spiritual revelation it really is, an exquisite earthly form, a shining hieroglyph, issuing from an absolute Mystery and organized in an intelligible

pattern, to express and symbolize for finite minds the perfect Beauty of that eternal world where all "these flowers as in their causes sleep."

Then, indeed, the profound, yet simple joy, with which the human mind recognizes in Beauty something akin to its own highest nature, and therefore intelligible, would teach us once more the secret of all great Art. We should learn once more to understand great poetry, and find richer content in those lines of Edmund Spenser:

"For of the Soul the body form doth take,  
For Soul is form and doth the body make."

We should recognize more fully the complement of that thought in Coleridge:

". . . we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live."

And we should discover that the two closing lines of Wordsworth's great Ode, staled as they have been by vacuous and thoughtless repetition, had depths beyond depths of meaning in their simplicity:

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

In a world that, as the latest science tells us, begins to look like a systematic expression of ideas, the flower itself might assume the aspect of a thought in the Eternal Mind.

It has been the function of poetry and true philosophy for three thousand years to quicken these perceptions in us. The gleam of wonder and surprise, the note of strangeness which has been discovered in the beauty of art and poetry have been regarded, for this reason, as evidences of the highest genius; and it is only because this reason is forgotten, that the contemporary world is so often unable to distinguish between the mere eccentricities of a disordered mind and the sane ecstasy of a mind in accord with universal harmonies. It was in this exalted, yet serene, mood—transcending time and space—that Wordsworth listened to the song of a bird

“Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.”

And in the music of the words we seem once more to hear a bird for the first time, and share the strange thrill of the first man on earth who perceived its beauty. It stirs us like a revelation; but it is a revelation of something that had always been there, though custom had obscured the miracle. In such a revelation, simple as it may appear, lies the whole secret of true “originality” in art and literature, and its kinship with the true originality of the scientific discoverer. It is not the thought of a novel invention, but the revelation of a hitherto undiscovered, though steadfast and universal, harmony that held the poet rapt before that immortal figure in stone:

“Newton, with his prism and silent face,  
The marble index of a mind for ever  
Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.”

The greatest of the philosophers have constantly endeavoured to awaken this sense of the strangeness, the miraculousness of the world that surrounds us, as it would appear to eyes undulled by use and wont. In every age, and in every generation, they have lent their powers to the same end. Sir Thomas More tells a sceptic that he can personally vouch for one amazing miracle. It is nothing less than this: that a young man and woman of his acquaintance, having been married for little more than a year, produced a miraculous human being which resembled both of them in many ways, and, growing at a great pace, in a short time surpassed them both in stature, though they both declared it had been drawn from the body of the mother, and at one time was no larger than a sparrow. This strange product of a woman's body was now six feet tall; it had eyes in its face like other men; and it could carry its own father on its back!

I quote from memory, but this is the gist of the passage; and the whole matter is summed up in the precious fragment of the lost work of Aristotle, quoted by Cicero in his treatise on the Nature of the Gods:

“If there were men whose habitations had been always under ground; in great and commodious houses, adorned with statues and pictures, furnished with everything that is said to make men happy; and if, without stirring from thence, they should be informed of a certain divine Power and Majesty, and, after some time, the earth should open and they should quit their

dark abode to come to us; where they should immediately behold the earth, the sky and the ocean; should contemplate the vastness of the clouds, and the strength of the winds; should gaze at the sun in his grandeur and beauty, and observe his generative power, and how day is caused by the diffusion of his light through the sky; and, while night has obscured the earth, they should consider the heavens glittering with stars; the wonderful variations of the moon, in her increase and waning; the rising and setting of the planets, and the inviolable order of their courses; when they should see these things, they would undoubtedly conclude that there is indeed a divine Power and Majesty and that these are His mighty works."

It is true, of course, that for the practical purposes of human life on this planet, a certain blindness is necessary. The work of the world in which we live would cease, at once, if we saw too clearly. There is a divine rationality in all those restrictions of our finite nature. The ancient declaration that no man can look upon God's face and live can be taken in this narrower sense also.

But this contraction of our sight should not mean intellectual oblivion. It should rather indicate a power to adjust the focus of our intellectual vision, so that it may be concentrated on the task in hand, and re-adjusted with the same precision to other orders of reality at the right moment. The astronomer does not examine the faces of his children with a spectroscope. But we must

not despise our new instruments; for these, too, in their right place, and rightly used, may sometimes indirectly illustrate the deeper realities. We may distrust physical analogies; but there must be few intelligent persons to whom wireless telegraphy has not suggested new thoughts about prayer, omniscience, and the power of the Spirit to transcend Time and Space and be immediately present everywhere. If our insignificant physical apparatus enables us to hear a voice from a distant continent before it reaches an auditor in the actual room where it is speaking, we seem to catch a faint glimpse, by analogy, of the deeper possibilities. They become more "reasonable" and "acceptable" to the modern mind; for the structure of the spiritual world must be infinitely more subtle; and we begin to understand what the "Angelic Doctor" meant when he said that the Spirit is "where it acts," and can be instantaneously present where it wills.

## CHAPTER XIV

*So Merlin taught me well  
Long since, in those old morning-coloured woods,  
To see the moment's miracle,  
And how all beauty in one may-tree broods,  
And heaven is brought to birth  
For man, in lesser heavens that dwell on earth.*

THE VISITANT





## CHAPTER XIV

ANALYSIS always follows the dwindling road. A single instance may elucidate my meaning here. Science tells us that all matter is composed of infinitesimal planetary systems of electrons and protons. Magnify in imagination a certain small part of the material world, the human countenance you love best. Magnify it through a microscope of inconceivable size until you can see it (with your mind's eye, at any rate) as a sort of Milky Way of such infinitesimal electrical systems. You may have been following quite accurately one order of truth, you may have arrived quite accurately at one order of truth, but what has happened to the values in the human countenance that you loved best? What has become of the expression in the eyes? What has become of the human affections that shone through them? Where do they reside? Is it somewhere in the interstellar spaces, as they may be called, between those electrical units? Or is it in the electrical units themselves? It seems possible that scientific analysis has somehow made us lose sight of the chief values in the universe. It seems possible that it has somehow lost the real significance, and that the real significance may be more apparent to the child whose eyes are normally focused, not on electrons, but on the expression in the countenance it loves best. If so, this is only one more confirmation from a new angle, of a very old statement about philosophers and children.

There are men of science who try to escape from this dilemma by asserting that their systems of electrons and protons are merely mathematical formulae. But the men who have "bombarded the atom"; the men who go into elaborate detail about the various arrangements of the electrons in the various "elements"; the men who can calculate the number of planetary systems that can dance on the point of a needle, cannot have it both ways. Their new scholasticism has, to a great extent, justified itself by practical results along certain highly specialized lines of research; and, although these lines all appear to lead us down the "dwindling road," and scientific theories to-day are superseded with bewildering rapidity, many of these infinitesimal results of analytical reasoning do appear to be true as far as they go. Nobody who has watched the "bombardment of the atom" in a modern laboratory could describe the experiment as merely algebraical. Nothing could be more actual and practical; and the pictorial word "bombardment" seemed to me, at any rate, as accurate as it was vivid. Certainly it was just as accurate on a small scale as when it is applied to the shelling of a fortress on the large scale. If the "formulae" do not give us "the thing in itself," they share that inability with all the other phrases we use about the external world and they give as true a representation of it as any other of the statements we make about the inexplicable elements or forces of which the "material" world is composed. It will be as bad for science as it is for religion, if its professors try to escape into a world of empty abstractions. The analytical reasoning of the new scholasticism is valid

within its own field, even though the senses, *visus*, *tactus*, *gustus*, offer no more verification than they did to the older scholasticism, whose deductive reasoning was also right in many of its conclusions about invisible values and realities of another and a higher order. There is no real contradiction between the valid results of analytical science, and the valid results of synthetic philosophy.

The apparent contradictions that the world once thought had been discovered between them are almost all due to the fact that they belong to orders or levels of thought as different as that of an electron from that of a flower, and are expressed in languages as different as an architect's blue-print from a picture by Turner.

By one of Time's odd revenges, Professor Whitehead has informed us recently that direct contradictions are beginning to appear between the various theories of modern science, contradictions of precisely the same kind as, it used to be thought, appeared only between science and religion, and (of course) only to the disadvantage of the latter. Professor Whitehead gives the following instance of science contradicting itself:

"Since the time of Newton and Huyghens there have been two theories as to the physical nature of light. Newton's theory was that a beam of light consists of a stream of very minute particles, and that we have the sensation of light when these particles strike the retinas of our eyes. Huyghens' theory was that light consists of very minute waves of trembling in an all-pervading ether, and that these waves are travelling along a beam

of light. *The two theories are contradictory. To-day there is one large group of phenomena which can be explained only on the wave theory, and another large group which can be explained only on the corpuscular theory.*"

Science has not even the excuse that these theories belong to different orders of thought; or that she is here dealing with those "ultimates" in which, as Goethe and Herbert Spencer agreed, with Francis Bacon. we are confronted by the supernatural.\*

But we ought not to be easily persuaded, even by science herself, that the laws and first principles of thought can be set aside, or that two theories which really contradict one another can be equally true. If things can be and not be, simultaneously, science is at an end and truth has no meaning. Professor Whitehead did not, of course, really believe that there is no possibility of a future reconciliation of the two theories. This appears from one or two subsequent sentences. The contradiction, therefore, is only apparent.

There is a section of the public, and the popular press, however, which opens its eyes and mouth at every indication of a contradiction, a gap, or a region of "indeterminacy" in nature, as though now at last there were an opportunity for religion. It is as though men should point to a vacuum as evidence for the existence of God.

At one moment the man in the street was rendered unable to think by misinterpretations of Einstein which tried to persuade him that if he ran towards a tree, there would be nothing wrong or unscientific in regarding

\*v. page 125.

himself as stationary and the landscape as moving. The fact that the man was out of breath when the tree arrived was a trivial detail. To-day we are threatened with a breach in nature, and a region of "indeterminacy" where events may take place without any cause at all. Curiously enough, there seem to be strict limits to such regions, and strict limits as to the kind and even the size of the event which may thus take place. Up to the present neither an elephant nor an egg has been produced out of the indeterminate hat. It seems to be necessary that both the event and the region in which it takes place should defy or defeat exact observation.

There is a real danger in the popular tendency to seize upon the first appearance of these illusory gaps and contradictions in nature as though they offered a new opportunity to religious thought. Complete agnosticism seems almost preferable to this popular anxiety to find an up-to-date excuse for self-delusion. But the deeper integrity of the scientific mind still waits patiently upon cause and effect, and accepts for its own secular purposes (and with overwhelming justification in results) the Psalmist's profound saying: "*Thy law is a lantern unto my feet.*"

Professor Whitehead, indeed, indicates the answer to his own riddle when he says that science can only follow the truth as she sees it, along her contradictory roads, in the hope that, later on, her divided specialists will meet again. This, of course, is a contradiction of the former statement that the theories are really contradictory. They may appear to be contradictory; but, if they are

ever embraced in a wider formula, the apparent contradiction will have vanished. The particle theory of light may give us a picture as different from the wave theory as a human face from the innumerable revolving electrons of which it is said to be composed, but none of these aspects of the truth contradicts another. The difficulty is not only that we cannot get all aspects into the same field of view, or that, like the two men in the fable, we are looking at different sides of the same shield. It goes deeper and is more complicated than that. We cannot co-ordinate these aspects, or even contemplate them successively without a deliberate alteration of our intellectual focus. But if apparent contradictions of so direct a kind could arise contemporaneously between one scientific theory and another, and if we were still able, with Professor Whitehead, to look benignantly on both, and even to accept both, and wait patiently upon future reconciliations, we were imperatively bound to accord at least equal patience to the apparent contradictions between the science of one generation and the religion of twenty centuries. Their aims were different; their terminology was different; the worlds in which they moved were different. The truth of one was akin to the truth of mathematics. The truth of the other was akin to the truth of great music, or great painting. One was quantitative. The other was qualitative. Religion, as Galileo said, tried to teach us how to go to heaven. It did not try to teach us how the heavens go. To quarrel with *Genesis* because it did not embody *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* was considerably less rational than to

quarrel with Darwin for obscuring or omitting the most important factor of his problem, a factor which was perfectly stated in the first four words of *Genesis*. The irrational neglect of this factor at the very point where it was essential to a theory which was undoubtedly true as far as it went, has caused the whole magnificent structure of Darwin's thought to crack and crumble like a house built on sand. Its walls are still standing, but there is hardly a scientist of eminence to-day who does not recognize the urgent need for props and scaffolding; and, if the cracks are examined, it will be found that they originated just where that omitted factor would most certainly have been introduced by the mind of a Newton.

In view of this, we may well claim with Faraday that, where entirely different orders of thought are concerned, we are entitled to deal with them separately; and even, sometimes, to lock the door of the analytical laboratory when the mind is engaged with the supreme syntheses of religion. The intellect and will of man, for instance, may well claim a separate charter for the freedom of which we are all conscious, and upon which all the arrangements of human society and civilized law are based, even though in view of another set of phenomena we all appear to be helpless cogs in a vast machine, moving to a predetermined end. The difficulty here is not that of overcoming direct contradictions; but of adjusting the focus of the mind to phenomena as different from one another as atoms from faces. We may not be able to co-ordinate them. The inductive method may be as useless for such a purpose as a tape-measure for estimating the distance between the



earth and the centre of the whole creation; or a post-office for communicating with God, if there be a God. But between valid conclusions in any of the different orders of truth there is no contradiction. It is useless to look at the stars through a microscope; and a telescope will not help us much with the minute forms of pond-life. Moreover, and most important of all, neither of these instruments is of the slightest use in other and higher fields. They add nothing to our knowledge of the radiance in children's eyes. They have nothing to tell us of justice or mercy; and neither the living nor the dead can be brought nearer by their aid. But the human mind can adjust its own focus to all those ends. This is our task: to adjust it so that we do not allow one order of truth to kill another; to adjust it so that we do not lose the form of the flower, the expression of the face, the freedom of the will, the kingdom of the mind, or the "Light whose smile kindles the universe," in a blind atomic maelstrom, whether those atoms be electrical accidents or merely mathematical hieroglyphs.

Lord Bacon (on no very solid ground, as I must always think) is commonly called the "Father of modern Science." Those who bestow that great title upon him will, therefore, hardly question his right to preface all these endeavours with his student's prayer: "that human things may not prejudice such as are divine; neither that from the unlocking of the gates of sense, and the kindling of a greater natural light, anything of incredulity or intellectual night, may arise in our minds towards divine mysteries."

## CHAPTER XV

*There's not a wisp of cloud  
Or flickering shadow of a summer leaf  
But lends its delicate note to the infinite range  
Of possible modulations, the reserves  
From which, at need, the Master-Player draws  
His natural-supernatural power to glide,  
In perfect freedom, through the laws He made;  
To keep them, yet transcend them; and so work  
His living Personal Will.*

THE LAST VOYAGE



## CHAPTER XV

It was just here—or so it seemed to me—that art and literature had their great part to play in modern life. When the physicist had finished his analysis and dissolved the external world into a mist of electrons (with all the other dissolutions of which I use that as a symbol), great art and great literature would save us from the dangers of over-specialization. They would restore the balance, reintegrate our cosmos, give us their new synthesis, readjust the focus of our intellectual vision and enable us once more to see the values that Gainsborough saw in our familiar landscape. When the psychological specialist, along his own dwindling road, had traced every human emotion back to the blind and loathsome stirrings of “a monstrous eft” in the primeval slime, great art and great literature would restore us those other values which Raphael found in the eyes of the Sistine Madonna, the values that Shakespeare discovered in the heart of Cordelia, the values that Shelley affirmed in the soul of Adonais. They would restore the lost glory that he saw in the face of Nature as, consciously or unconsciously, he caught up the opening music of the *Paradiso*:

“That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move.”

They would restore us those values which, more simply, a child finds in its mother's face. Great art and great

literature, as Arnold had said, were not fettered by historical facts, or dissolved by scientific analysis. "The strongest part of our religion to-day was its unconscious poetry," and perhaps the strongest part of our literature was its unconscious religion—that breath of another and a more abiding world which it conveyed to us.

This aspect of great poetry, and of great art generally, had been recognized in every æsthetic philosophy of any importance from Plato to Hegel. Great poetry, and great art, showed us the world *sub specie æternitatis*. This was the real secret of the "magic" touch of genius. Whether the poet were conscious of it or not, it was this, in undertones of music that gave

" . . . the gleam,  
The light that never was on sea or land,  
The consecration and the poet's dream."

For two thousand years, in the greatest art and poetry of the world there had been this profound affinity with religion. Whether the poet were pagan or Christian, wherever his work achieved that beauty which, even in our ephemeral generations, we call "immortal," or that greatness which, even on our low earth, we call sublime, it was touched, transfused, and sometimes transfigured by light from the eternal world. The Greek drama was born of profoundly religious ideas; and the poets of Christendom continually reinforced their own great argument by illustrations drawn from the poetry of paganism:

"Methought I saw my late espoused saint  
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,"

said Milton; and Dante followed Virgil through hell, and purgatory, on his own quest.

Whether the poet were a pagan or a Christian, and whether he stood as a man without hope, against a background of everlasting farewells, or as one that stretched out his hands in no vain longing to those upon the ulterior shore. neither the parting nor the welcome were trivial. The sound of the eternal sea was in their ears; and they kept a light burning before the altar of righteousness, even though it were dedicated to the unknown God, and the world around them wallowed in superstition. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Virgil, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Goethe, widely as they might differ in their philosophy, were alike in this, that they looked through Time into the eternal realities. The Prometheus of Aeschylus and the Faust of Goethe are one with Hamlet in this. They are concerned with those ultimates in which, as Goethe said, we see God; and whether they discover Him or not, they have all touched the hem of "the garment we see Him by." Great tragedy is something more than meaningless annihilation. There is no tragedy in the destruction of a fortuitous concourse of atoms by another equally fortuitous concourse. Great tragedy is an affirmation of spiritual values. Sometimes it affirms them by the very bitterness of its protest against their loss; sometimes it depicts the triumph of the spirit over the wreck of its temporal habitation. They are combined in the dying cry of Hamlet to his friend:

"Absent thee from felicity awhile."

The supreme symbol of tragedy is the Cross and it holds the secret, not only of humiliation, pain, defeat and death, but of spiritual resurrection and the entering into eternal life.

In this sense, through all its centuries, from the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus to the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley, the greatest literature of the world had been supremely concerned with the "supernatural." Whether we turn to the great religious books of the East, or the clear-cut ceremonial of the Greek drama; whether Isaac or Iphigenia be led to the altar; whether Dante or Milton or Goethe attempt to justify the ways of God to man; there are "witnesses, cohorts about them, to left and to right, angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware."

But the word "supernatural" is as dangerous as the phrase "free-will"; and it is well to discover at the outset exactly what we mean by it. Materialists often assume (a) that it means something that has no reality, or (b) that it is a contradiction of the reign of law. They then proceed to win their case by deducing very solemnly from those assumptions the perfectly just conclusions that (a) things which have none of the attributes of reality cannot exist and that (b) a contradiction of the universal reign of law is universally ruled out.

There are foolish persons who succeed in keeping the debate alive by disputing these points, just as there are persons who would deny the freedom of the will on the ground that our "free-will" is our own and that it chooses what *we* desire, and not what others desire. "Bound by

your own nature" they exclaim, and are puzzled when Einstein quite justly remarks that if they expect anything else, their notion of "choice" and "free-will" is utterly meaningless to him. If the will is not to be the will of an individual, it is nobody's will, unless the millennium has come and God's will is done in all. Doubtless this is unfortunate for the bad individual; for he will probably choose badly. But the worst individual can avail himself of the impersonal laws of reason, unless he is insane, and then even our law-courts acquit him both of freedom and responsibility. There are difficulties which Einstein's argument does not remove, difficulties with which we are not concerned for the moment; but there is no question at all that Einstein is right about the utter meaninglessness of the phrase "free-will" in the mouths of those who have not made up their minds whether they want a definite nature of their own or not, or whether, having that nature, they would like their will to be the will of that nature, or the will of some other nature. The only real answer to the riddle is determined by the philosophy of Christendom. "Our wills are ours to make them Thine." If there is no deliverance from our imperfect selves, along the road of God's grace, and with the aid of the impersonal and universal laws of reason, into the absolute realm in which we find our truer selves and still retain the centre of our personality, there is no deliverance anywhere. But this is a digression.

The word "supernatural" is equally misused by the materialist and the superstitious; and, in many ways, I preferred the former to the latter. No hair-shirt could be



more maddening to the body than the gross superstitions of the shallow religious to a mind aching for the deeper realities.

The antidote to both is a careful reading of the opening chapters on the ultimate uncaused Cause in Spencer's *First Principles*, and Carlyle's first chapter on "Natural Supernaturalism" in *Sartor Resartus*. The conclusion of both philosophers is exactly the opposite of the famous story of the scientist who, on meeting a ghost, remarked, "Very interesting. But I am not afraid. A ghost that really exists is merely another scientific fact."

Carlyle, who in his own way was as much an agnostic as Spencer, looks at the scientific "fact" and discovers that, *fundamentally*, it is itself supernatural. It is not only a mystery. It is that overwhelming and impossible thing, a miracle. In this of course, he is confirming, from his very different point of view, the statement of Spencer, which was noticed earlier. He is fulfilling, though he wrote in prose, the function of great poetry, which is concerned not with the unreal or fantastic, but with the far profounder mystery of reality.

"Ghosts," says Carlyle, "there are nigh a thousand million walking the earth openly at noontide; some half-hundred have vanished from it, some half-hundred have arisen in it, ere thy watch ticks once.

"O, Heaven, it is mysterious, it is awful to consider that we not only carry each a future ghost within him; but are, in very deed, Ghosts! These Limbs, whence had we them; this stormy Force; this life-blood with its burning Passion? They are dust and shadow; a shadow-system

gathered round our Me; wherein through some moments or years the Divine Essence is to be revealed in the flesh."

Throughout this passage Carlyle is inspired by one of the greatest passages in Shakespeare; a passage that has been made reasonable and acceptable to the modern mind by the scientific representation of the material universe as an electrical phenomenon. Shakespeare, as we saw, in the passage which so many persons have quoted with unction, but without belief, was not merely being "poetical." He was at grips with what modern physicists like Lord Rutherford would call a "scientific fact." Philosophers hardly needed this confirmation; but science, resolving all objects into little centres of electric force, has certainly made it easier for the "practical man" to envisage the shrivelling up of the heavens like "a flaming scroll," and the vanishing of the whole electrical manifestation which we call the universe.

"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."

But the real clue to the thought in its fullness, as I said in a former chapter, is given earlier:

"These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits . . ."

It is the appearances that melt and vanish. What actually *exists* is the spirit. It is this profound consciousness of the underlying realities that gives significance to the ghostly visitations in Shakespeare. For stage purposes he must use some of the old trappings of the stage ghost; but in *Hamlet*, as in *Macbeth* (both with the ghost of Banquo and the witches), it is their spiritual significance that lends the real power to his supernatural effects. No great poet has any use for the suspension of the laws of cause and effect which is the common notion of the "supernatural" or "miraculous" among the materialists. In attacking that figment of their own brains they are attacking an artificial light in a turnip-lantern. The miraculous may be described as interrupting the customary order of events, but it postulates a real cause of a higher kind than any with which we are usually confronted—that ultimate supernatural cause of whose existence Spencer said we were more sure than of anything else whatsoever. Just as in the dog-world, man may be a worker of miracles by controlling certain elementary laws of nature and even overcoming them through his knowledge of higher laws, so in the man-world things may happen, things do happen (though we do not always notice them), which are only explicable in regions above and beyond human reason. Of this kind of happening Shakespeare is perhaps the greatest exponent in literature. He gropes always after "the divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Shakespearean critics have not always realized what a tremendous factor this supernatural shaping sometimes becomes in the

dramatic movement of his plays. A slight example is to be found in the prophecy of the witches that Macbeth will not be defeated "till Birnam wood do come to Dunsinane." And the significance of it is not in the merely physical aspect any more than it is in the somewhat disappointing external fulfilment of the prophecy by the soldiers when they pluck the boughs of the wood and carry them over their heads towards the castle. But that fulfilment, in its way, is an example of how the natural and the supernatural, the physical and the metaphysical, may work together. Behind that march of the soldiers there is something far more terrible; a tremendous earth-cleaving and forest-uprooting movement of the supernatural forces of the divine law. Macbeth, by his own act, has broken the bonds of nature:

"It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood.

Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak."

And so, when the merely superficial fulfilment comes, and the messenger enters dumb with terror to tell him of it, the rational imagination of Shakespeare suggests by a single touch something more than the merely scientific observer, dealing with the external, would have admitted for a moment. Macbeth cries:

"Thou comest to use thy tongue; thy story quickly!"  
and the messenger replies,

"As I did stand my watch upon the hill,  
I looked towards Birnam, and anon, methought,  
The wood began to move . . ."

The supernatural power of that moment can never be fully realized on the stage. It is fraught with all the terrors implied in the strange old word—*panic*. In its effect upon the mind of Macbeth it bears no relation to its merely material cause. It is as if, moved by some great hand behind the universe, the mountains themselves were coming like billows to obliterate the wrong. There is a passage in *The Tempest*—that marvellous poem of the supernatural—in which the same view of nature, as a system under the control of the Spirit, is very subtly suggested:

“The powers delaying, not forgetting, have  
Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures  
Against your peace.”

And this passage, as I think the critics have not observed, is an almost literal translation of one of the profoundest passages in Thomas à Kempis:

*Quia autem frequenter et graviter peccavi tibi, merito  
armatur contra me omnis creatura.*

The suggestion in all this is not of a mechanically-worked universe, pulled by strings, as in Mr. Hardy's *Dynasts*; but rather of a vast symphonic composition, in which the infinite subtleties and delicate adjustments may be likened to those of music, expressing the supreme Will of the Master-Musician. I find the true supernatural of poetry not in the sheeted ghosts of Edgar Allan Poe, or the devil-women of Coleridge (though the *Ancient Mariner* comes near to it), but in this sense of the infinitely

mysterious realities behind phenomena; and these realities are the concern of religion also. It is not in the abrupt evidences of superstition, but in the permanent wonder

“Of something far more deeply interfused  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.”

It is to be found, I think, far more in the great sixth book of the *Æneid* than in the earlier exploration of the kingdom of the dead by Homer. It is Virgil, not Homer, who really sounds the depths below the tumult; and though critics now regard Virgil as secondary even to Lucretius, I believe that like most fashions this notion will perish; that it was due to a temporary mood of the modern mind; and that the full meaning of Dante's choice of Virgil as his guide from hell to heaven will one day re-enthroned Virgil as the greatest of all the poets of antiquity before the Christian era.

In Homer's picture of the land of the departed, Odysseus converses chiefly with a few famous persons; while in direct opposition to the commonly accepted view Virgil gives us not only his outstanding individuals, but also the vast background and glimmering multitudes of the unknown dead, and touches it all with the infinite pity that overcame the awful spirit of Dante. He sees the throng of souls rushing like a tide of the sea towards the bank of Acheron, wives and husbands, warriors, boys and young girls that had been laid on the funeral pyre before their parents' eyes, thick as autumn leaves in Vallombrosa (for Milton also borrowed here). He sees them standing on the banks, imploring to be taken across the dark stream, and surely no line in the poetry of the world is so instinct

with tears as that which describes the outstretching of their hands in the last agony of longing:

*Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.*

More majestic still is his terrible vision of the dark abysses of retribution (in which he is indeed the master in every sense of Dante) where Phlegyas in his deep gulf of pain warns the world and cries through the livid gloom "Learn righteousness and not to scorn the gods." But beyond and above all this is the passage in which Anchises takes up the tale, and shows his son how universal nature is moved by the sovereign Mind. The Middle Ages were right. No such profound undertones of spiritual music ever came to any other poet of the pre-Christian world; and it is only an academic fashion that prevents the world from saying so again. It is this vision of the supremacy of the mind over the natural universe that gives the values of reality to Virgil's exploration of the kingdom of the dead. It is to be found in Dante, whose glorious opening of the earlier *Paradiso* was almost literally translated (though I think this again has not been observed by the commentators) in the greatest lines of Shelley:

"That Light whose smile kindles the universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move."

It is to be found in a lesser degree in Milton, who never quite gives us the feeling of that unmateriality of the material which Dante, even when he seems to hew his hells out of the solid rock, does convey. Milton is vaguely magnificent where Dante is clear-cut; but Milton is more

of a materialist in the nineteenth century sense, and the golden compasses of his Deity are a very different affair from "the Love that moves the sun and the other stars." At the same time Milton seems to realize this, and he invites a translation of his terms when he says in lines which Einstein could not have made more scientifically appropriate to our own age:

"Immediate are the acts of God, more swift  
Than time or motion; but to human ears  
Cannot without process of speech be told,  
So told as earthly notion can receive."

This deeper sense of the supernatural realities appears under another aspect in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, where he debates the possibility of communion with the dead:

"No visual shade of someone lost  
But he, the spirit himself may come,  
Where all the nerve of sense is numb,  
Spirit to spirit, ghost to ghost.

"O, therefore, from thy sightless range  
With gods in unconjectured bliss,  
O, from the distance of the abyss  
Of tenfold complicated change,

"Descend, and touch, and enter. Hear  
The wish, too strong for words to name,  
That, in this darkness of the frame,  
My ghost may feel that thine is near."

Browning's *Abt Vogler* and *Saul* are other instances, and give other aspects of the same supernatural reality behind



phenomena; and all these instances confirm and fit in with one another as nothing but the fact that they are essentially true could make them. *Saul* gives the opposite side to that which we so often get in the tragedies of Shakespeare. In the latter the powers are often "incensed against our peace." In the former they are a source of inspiration and strength:

"I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.

There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,

Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware."

And the supernatural ground of this vision is one before which all mere phantoms fade, for it is the incomprehensible Reality of the Supreme Being in whose image we ourselves are made. The vital experience—in poetry or religion—of the true supernatural is when the living personality which is the ultimate reality in each of us recognises or receives through the veils of the material world some intimation of that Personality, which is the supreme Reality behind them, as in the superb conclusion to the strange epistle of Karshish, the Arab physician:

"The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?

So, the All-Great were the All-Loving, too—

So, through the thunder comes a human voice

Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!

Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!

Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,

But love I gave thee, with myself to love,  
And thou must love me who have died for thee!  
The madman saith He said so: it is strange."

The Greeks saw Proteus rising from the sea, and Apollo charioteering the sun. Voices whispered to them from the woods and the water-springs. They saw the "Islands of the Blest" in the sunset-clouds. But all these things were indirect hints, echoes, shadows, of the great supernatural world of which our "natural" universe is the veil. They vanish, like the Elizabethan ghosts, before the greater vision. As Shakespeare himself said:

"Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,  
The bird of dawning cryeth all night long;  
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,  
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,  
No fairy takes nor witch hath power to charm:  
So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

The meaning of the lines can be deepened and broadened, as all poetry can be deepened and broadened, to the depth and breadth of Reality itself; and, when that is done in the mind of the reader, he needs no ghost from the grave to tell him that every time his living personal will enables him to lift his own hand the supernatural power of the spirit over the material world and its laws has been manifested; and that as this power and control over the material environment extends and grows with the growth of human personality, so it becomes clearer that the supreme control over all the material universe

may be attributed to the living will of the supreme Personality. The function of the poet, said Dante, is to note those occasions when a glimpse of the workings of Love in the universe is vouchsafed to him. That Love, in the final and complete vision, is the Love "that moves the sun and the other stars." The Mover is above and greater than that which is moved. This is why we call the latter "natural" and the former "supernatural"; and this is why we say that the dust returns to the dust, and the spirit to God who gave it.

The value of all these separate conclusions of minds so diverse was not merely in their amazing agreement on certain ultimate truths which many of them seemed to perceive directly and intuitively, rather than by discourse of reason; it was not even in the unanimity with which they all pointed in the direction of the *philosophia perennis* but it was in the illumination which they all *received* from that philosophy, an illumination which discovered their own meanings, completed their broken phrases, clarified their obscurities, gave significance to their gropings, and confirmed a thousand shadowy hints and intuitions. It was like the experience of a man groping about a dark and unfamiliar room in the middle of the night, and trying to distinguish window-frames from doors by feeling them with his hands, when, at last, he finds the electric switch and floods the whole room with light. Everything at once fits into its place; and things that puzzled him or seemed contradictory receive not only their own explanation, but an explanation that reconciles them with everything else.

## CHAPTER XVI

*Burn, Phœnix, burn;  
And, in thy burning, take  
All that love taught me, all I strove to learn,  
All that I made, and all I failed to make.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH



## CHAPTER XVI

MATTHEW ARNOLD had said that "the strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry." It seemed even more true that the strongest part of our creative literature was its unconscious religion. Here, then, for a time it seemed there might be a substitute for what we had lost. Great art and great literature would enable us to see life steadily and see it whole, from that central point of view which was once maintained for us by a historic religion. They would serve to us all as priests of the wonder and bloom of the world. They would quicken our senses and perceptions of those values in the world around us which the human spirit recognizes as akin to its own values. When those spiritual intimations dawned upon us in the loveliness of Nature, though we might be vouchsafed only a fleeting smile of the Light Invisible, and we could see no countenance and comprehend no word, we should begin like the child of Virgil's radiant line,

*risu cognoscere matrem.*

If there were any meaning at all in what appeared to be their moments of deepest insight, great art and great literature could do even more for us. The language that they tried to speak was not altogether of this world. It served as an intermediary. They might act as interpreters, between ourselves and the unknowable Reality; for, while their silent and harmonious language, in its

perfection, seems to belong to the eternal order, it is also the native tongue of the human spirit. We might learn it slowly, in broken phrases and disconnected fragments; but, in a deeper sense than the poet himself realized, and with all the heights and depths that Plato would have comprehended in the sentence, it seemed possible that Keats had summed up the new creed in two lines:

“Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty, that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

These great lines of Keats carried their own peril, however, unless they were rightly understood. Their true meaning is to be found in the *Symposium* of Plato. It is only as attributes of the Eternal that Truth and Beauty are perfectly at One. The whole of the poem on the *Grecian Urn* is permeated by an exquisite sense of the abiding behind the transient; and of the permanent as the necessary ground of all the processional changes of Time. Its greatness as poetry depends entirely on its profound, though often unconscious, sense of the Eternal. It is this and this alone that gives “magic” to the line, and touches a landscape with the light which, as a great painter said, is “the soul of the picture.”

It is this that deepens all the great distances and horizons of the earlier romantic movement, with its “old unhappy far off things, and battles long ago.” The lyrics of Elizabethan England, or Augustan Rome, if they achieved real beauty, seemed to achieve it by sounding that note of the eternal. They might deny, but they brought us into relation with it. Catullus with his *Frater*,

*Ave atque Vale!* Virgil, with his heroic picture of the dying warrior,

*Olli dura quies oculos et ferreus urguet  
Somnus, in æternam clauduntur lumina noctem*

where the heavy "somnus" turning over and pausing at the beginning of the second line gives as clearly as sculpture the very droop of the head towards the eternal night. It was the first passage in Latin poetry that gave me the sense of beauty, and I know now that it struck home and haunted me as few other lines have done because it awakened, though only by negation, the hunger for eternal things.

And all this fitted exactly into what the poets, often unconsciously, and the philosophers, consciously, began to tell me of the nature of Beauty. Hegel's saying, that Beauty was simply the Spirit of God revealing itself sensuously fitted perfectly into what English minds, as various as those of Browning, Wordsworth and Shelley had affirmed. Shelley in his "Essay on Poetry" agreed with Plato across the centuries, and Plotinus elucidated both. "Beauty," said Plotinus, "is a property in things which the Soul recognizes as akin to its own essence, while the ugly is that which it feels to be alien and antipathetic. Beautiful things remind the Soul of its own spiritual nature; they do so because they participate in form, which comes from the spiritual world. The absence of such form constitutes ugliness; the absolutely ugly is that which is entirely devoid of 'divine meaning.'" Spenser re-echoed it back



“For of the Soul the body form doth take  
For Soul is form and doth the body make.”

But this Soul, of course, as Plotinus tells us, is not the individual Soul which can only admire, but the universal Soul of God.

“If we could behold Him who gives all beings their perfection, if we could rest in the contemplation of Him, and become like Him. . . . This is the great end, the supreme aim of Souls; it is the want of this vision that makes men unhappy.”

The flaw in Matthew Arnold's reasoning therefore, is only too apparent to-day; for, where there is no vision, art and literature perish. There was a time when great art and great literature might have saved us from the narrowing effects of specialism. But art and literature to-day are suffering from the same disease. Their exponents, with few exceptions, have no belief in real values. They are giving over to analysis what was meant for synthesis; and, where they should be creative, or interpretative of life in its fullness, they offer us critical dissections and the disintegrated relics of a post-mortem. More than ever before, they mistake these superficial factual reports for truth; and, if the “facts” are repulsive enough, they are inclined to suggest that truth requires no further evidence. It is not only the “facts” of religion that are failing us. For contemporary art and literature the light in the estranged face of that all too human illusion which used to be called Love has withdrawn to a depth which no telescope can fathom. We understand the passions. The

more brutal they are the better we understand them, and the "stronger" we declare their artistic exponents to be. But the affections are beyond our range. The sense of tears in mortal things may still ache within us, under other and perhaps more brutal names; but our chemical analysis of those tears, and our estimate of the quantity of salt in them, is complete and exquisitely accurate. Something has gone, it is true:

"One thing, one, in my soul's full scope,  
Either I missed, or itself missed me."

The values in which the former greatness of art and literature resided have refused to abide our question. They cannot exist in a society which has lost the simple power of direct vision, and, at any moment, from sheer inability to co-ordinate or reassemble the unified vision of things that the specialists have parted among them, may decide that it prefers the ugly to the beautiful, or seriously doubt whether, after all, lust may not be the "higher continence"; breaking your pledged word a nobler form of freedom; and evil itself the "higher good." Many a former age has been more "wicked," in the older and more naïve sense of the word. But the stern warning of that great Englishman, Dr. Johnson, might have been uttered with our contemporary world spread out before him. No age hitherto has so earnestly questioned whether wrong might not be right, or so seriously endeavoured to obliterate the distinctions between them. This last blasphemy was reserved for our own generation. Even Macbeth recognized the powers of evil that rode

through the thickening light, but to-day it is the anæmic professor who rides on the chaotic darkness, chanting:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair,  
Hover through the fog, and filthy air.”

And the miserable man believes it.

The standards are in complete confusion. Every authority, conservative or otherwise, in every branch of art and life, tells the same story. Goodness, Truth and Beauty may have fled like detected criminals. On the other hand, they may have been of too august a nature to attend our small assize.

In any case, their values depended on real beliefs; beliefs that we have rejected or forgotten because they seemed to be involved with a religion whose “facts” had failed us. Art and literature were themselves more closely involved with the essential truths of religion than we realized, and, when religion went, the radiant Presences that had haunted art and literature for so long began to withdraw also.

Literature and literary criticism, having made effectiveness of statement and vividness of impression their first concern, have become profoundly unreliable in all matters where truth is of the first importance. In a period when, despite their contempt for any considerations but those of effect, their loudest profession is their desire to tell the whole truth, this leads to confusion.

We may be Platonists enough to believe that, ultimately, Beauty and Truth are aspects of one Reality, or attributes of one supreme Perfection which has been

named God. But it does not seem to have occurred to any one that, where the artist has not reached those ultimate heights, a lie, or one of those half-truths that are worse than lies, may be delivered with great artistic effect. It may even be heightened by all the tricks of superficial realism that are mistaken for the evidence of truth in art to-day. It may be coloured by all the adjectives that are supposed to deepen the effect of sincerity, and set a convincing seal on the verisimilitude of the artistic statement. Again and again, even in the field of biography, books are temporarily exalted to the heights, on account of their vividness, and without the slightest regard to the far more vital question of their truth. It does not seem to be realized that any liar finds it much easier to be vivid and even sensationally effective, if he is not hampered by facts; and that this applies to psychological representations where falsehood is less easily detected, as well as to impressions of the outside world. If literature were content to be a source of entertainment, no great harm would be done. But in the last few decades, it has insisted more and more vehemently upon contradictory theories about its own nature, whereby it attempts both to eat its cake and have it—to tickle or scorch its readers into attention by all the methods of the publicity agent, and at the same time to claim the respect due to real seekers after truth.

In literature and art, therefore, we find the prevailing confusion worse confounded, and there can be no help in them for the world's bewilderment until they recover their lost integrity.

The present chaos is a direct result of the facts described with cold impartiality by John Stuart Mill in his *Autobiography*. His utilitarian views and strict early training in agnosticism make his frankness all the more impressive.

"When the philosophic minds of the world can no longer believe its religion," he says, "or can only believe it with modifications amounting to an essential change of its character, a transitional period commences, of weak convictions, paralysed intellects, and growing laxity of principle, which cannot terminate until a renovation has been effected in the basis of their belief, leading to the evolution of some faith, whether religious or merely human, which they can really believe: and when things are in this state, all thinking or writing which does not tend to promote such a renovation, is of very little value beyond the moment."

It is over sixty years since Mill wrote, and the confusion is still growing. The chief hope is in the fact that the disease is forcing the more intelligent to re-examine some of the beliefs which Mill was "not allowed" to hold. The modern world amuses itself; but it is not happy. Its inner loss is too deep; and many are beginning to suspect that they have thrown away the gold with the dross.

## CHAPTER XVII

*Yet we, who are borne on one dark grain of dust  
Around one indistinguishable spark  
Of star-mist, lost in one lost feather of light,  
Can, by the strength of our own thought, ascend  
Through universe after universe; trace their growth  
Through boundless time, their glory, their decay;  
And, on the invisible road of law, more firm  
Than granite, range through all their length and breadth,  
Their height and depth, past, present and to come.*

WATCHERS OF THE SKY



## CHAPTER XVII

THE position is ironically complicated by the fact that this inner loss is very largely due to some of the greatest achievements of the human intellect. Literature and art have never really recovered from the vast disorientation caused by two great scientific achievements. The first of these was the theory of a certain canon of the Church—Copernicus—which destroyed the old comfortable assurance that the earth was the centre of things; and, apparently, reduced mankind to insignificance by the mere size of the physical universe.

The second was the Darwinian theory which subjected our inner world to an even more disintegrating scrutiny; shook the spirit of man with doubts as to the values of human personality; analyzed the ethical ideals and true affections of which he had been so directly conscious; and dissolved them all once more into the formless and chaotic darkness of a sub-conscious jungle.

“There were steaming pools  
Of darkness, and the smell of the wild beast  
Musky and acrid on the blood-warm air.”

All those arguments which diminish the stature of man by pointing to the insignificance of his midget planet among the “fifteen hundred universes” which passed in review before the mind of Herschel; all those questions as



to whether human beings can possibly have the importance which religion attaches to them, and whether, therefore, anything in human life really matters in the least; all those arguments addressed to the humility of man are the illegitimate off-spring of the perfectly true theory of Copernicus. By their emotional appeal to the modesty of individuals, they unconsciously endeavour to inhibit a reply. Much of the modern spiritual depression, much of the modern bitterness and "defeatism" in literature is unconsciously born of it. Yet no *argumentum ad hominem* ever concealed a greater multitude of fallacies. In the first place, it is the intellectual wings of man himself that dwarf his own world to nothingness beneath him.

We are constantly being taken up to a great physical height in order that, sharing the satisfaction of some great literary observer, we may see the rest of mankind crawling like ants over the plains below. In other words, we play tricks with the physical focus in order to destroy values that are not physical. We ought not to lose sight of the fact that the outward littleness of the lives of men is only demonstrated in such cases by the magnitude of man's own intellectual vision. Never was there a more blundering self-contradiction in the realm of values. It is like trying to know your friend better by looking at his face through the wrong end of the telescope. Quite apart from the different orders of value that are in question here, the scientific observer, in his own field, would refuse to examine either a microbe or the spiral nebulae in that fashion. In only one field has the perversity of human nature decided that it can see the significance of an

object best by reducing it to the vanishing point. Nothing is more characteristic of our time than the inverted arrogance with which men have thus abdicated their true kingdom and insisted upon dwarfing their own stature. Nothing could be more different from the true humility of the shepherd-king who, looking up at that deeper night of Eastern stars, discovered the true category of his littleness, and compared spirit with Spirit:

“When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him, or the Son of Man that Thou visitest him?”

It is a passage that has an overwhelming beauty, and a far greater depth than appears to a careless reader. For neither the mindfulness nor the visitation are denied. Here, as always in the noble English version, there is the exquisite sense of the older and hidden meanings of words, the inner meanings which, like the faded colours in an ancient tapestry, give tone and subtlety to a great language greatly used.

The root meaning of the word “consider” (*con*, together, and *sidus*, a constellation), a vision that sets the stars in order, sums them up and interprets their glory as a whole, is met by the infinite comprehension of that other Vision.

The stars are not “cold fires . . .

with power to burn and brand  
His nothingness into man”;

for spirit here is gazing through the material world at Spirit. The awe of the shepherd-king is one with that of the great philosopher of Königsberg when he contemplated the order of the starry heavens above him and the moral law within him. It is touched with that strange sense in which love and worship, ecstasy and reverence are one, the sense of *das Heilige*; and so far from diminishing the stature of man, it continues (with the divine humility of one who knows himself to be the predestined Temple of God): "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet."

If these passages be compared with the words of the modern poet who, after eliminating God and drowning the universe in an eternal night, proceeded to declare, in an ecstasy entirely devoid of reverence, that man (whose kingdom he had thus destroyed) was nevertheless in his own right the supreme "Master of Things," we shall not hesitate long as to which is the subtler, the deeper, and the more comprehensive view.

It is a curious and significant fact that, when man thought himself of some value in the eyes of his Maker, he was acquainted with true humility; while to-day, when he is never tired of pointing out the ultimate insignificance of human life, he has almost lost the meaning of reverence and become almost entirely ego-centric. This in itself is hardly an improvement on the old geo-centric scheme of things; but it may be a necessary stage in the

movement towards a recognition of the true centre of man himself in God. Not till our world becomes Theocentric will the dislocation caused by Copernicus and Darwin be set right. At present, throughout the whole range of modern thought, we see an amazing illustration of the truth enunciated by Philo: "He who tries to flee from God takes refuge in himself." If man discovers that the Eternal is there also, he may still recover that centre of his universe which is not affected by Copernicus, and recover also the true ground of his own self-reverence. The insignificance of our midget planet among the "fifteen hundred universes" of Herschel is not so striking as the fact that a mere speck upon our midget planet was able thus to survey and co-ordinate the whole in an intelligible scheme. The sun, that immense cloud of fiery vapour, could not do it. Orion—in all its constellated physical majesty—was blind to it.

The "fifteen hundred universes" themselves, together with the three thousand million "new stars" revealed by the hundred-inch telescope (but revealed only to man, not to one another), unless they also carried some of those invisible specks of intelligence, revolved in utter oblivion. Men of science, as well as idealistic philosophers, tell us to-day that even those "revolutions" mean nothing apart from the relationships established by the mind, and that nothing but what is mental is left to us of the old "physical" universe. In this case, our invisible specks begin to regain their value, and man can be regarded once more as "the measure of things."

Rousseau, that revolutionary prophet of the modern

world, trying to discover man's place in the universe, remarked through his Savoyard mouth-piece:

*"Je suis le seul qui ait inspection sur le tout. Quel être ici-bas, hors l'homme, sait observer tous les autres, mesurer, calculer, prévoir leur mouvement, leurs effets, et joindre, pour ainsi dire, le sentiment de l'existence commune à celui de son existence individuelle? Qu'y a-t-il de si ridicule à penser que tout est fait pour moi, si je suis le seul qui sache tout rapporter à lui."*

Man, he says, by contemplation appropriates even the stars which he cannot approach. There is no other creature who can both make use of fire and admire the sun. He can feel what order and beauty and virtue are; he is able to contemplate the universe, "*s'élever à la main qui le gouverne.*" He can love the good and do it; and yet he is to level himself with the beasts: "*Ame abjecte, c'est ta triste philosophie qui te rend semblable à elles; ou plutôt tu veux en vain t'avilir, ton génie dépose contre tes principes, ton cœur bienfaisant dément ta doctrine, et l'abus même de tes facultés prouve leur excellence en dépit de toi.*"

An age which is less sure of its own virtues than the nineteenth century may yet find some redeeming qualities in the religion of Rousseau. Our tolerance in some other directions is hardly consistent with the moral indignation which is heaped upon the author of *Émile*. Nor are the values of that great interlude—the *Profession de Foi*—cancelled by its author's many failings. If he made Voltaire desire to "go on all fours," the modern world which, with hardly a protest, has accepted realistic pictures on the

cinematograph of sexual scenes between apes of the jungle and half-naked, "over-civilized" women; scenes carried to the penultimate stage of erotic and provocative excitement, has little right to throw stones at Jean-Jacques.

The descent of "civilized" man from the heights to which he once aspired has been rapid; and even those who have done most to restore the sense of real values occasionally strike the note of pessimism. Dean Inge, more than any other living Englishman, perhaps, has consistently pointed to that true kingdom in which we are "above Atlas his shoulders." Yet even he, in his latest work, *God and the Astronomers*, speaks as though the universe, by mere physical vastness, dwarfs what he calls the "petty interests" of man. It is only a moment's concession, for elsewhere he proves that he, too, could echo the lines of the poet:

*Flottez, soleils des nuits, illuminez les sphères,  
Bourdonnez sous votre herbe, insectes éphémères!  
Rendons gloire là-haut, et dans nos profondeurs,  
Vous par votre néant, et vous par vos grandeurs,  
Et toi par ta pensée, homme, grandeur suprême  
Miroir qu'il a créé pour s'admirer lui-même,  
Écho que dans son œuvre il a si loin jeté  
Afin que son saint nom fût partout répété,  
Que cette humilité qui devant lui m'abaisse  
Soit un sublime hommage, et non une tristesse.*

Merely on scientific grounds, however, there are better reasons for returning to the ancient idea of "man as the

measure of things" than would appear to the superficial observer; and I never felt this more strongly than during the night which I was privileged to spend in the hundred-inch observatory on the Californian mountains. There were men counting their suns by thousands of millions; calculating the speed of constellations that had perhaps vanished centuries ago, though their light was still reaching us. They could look into those boundless spaces from their own little centre, and estimate by spectroscopic photographs the proportions of the elements in suns that were no more; and, as one looked out at those glittering points in an abyss which, however vast, could do nothing of the kind, it was impossible not to feel that out there was the emptiness, while here in the minds of those who observed it all, was the real significance. To let the gaze travel from one to the other, from those distant glittering points to the dark earnest faces of the human watchers, with the intelligence in their eyes, was like returning from a blank desert to a metropolis, from the Sahara to the centre of the world. Other centres there might be, and probably are, out there; but, if so, they, too, must be centres of intelligence and thought—mind that has no parts and no magnitude, no extension, no weight, no measure. They did not share the physical vastness of the starry sky. The brevity of our physical life has no bearing on the matter. A block of stone may be larger and endure longer in time than the physical frame of a prophet, a saint, or the great artist who can shape the stone into a masterpiece. But this is no criterion of their respective values. The observer must always be superior to the

object which is incapable of observation. It is only the observer that can focus such objects and their relationships into significance, and this sets him above them.

It is a most solemn fact, and one of which the significance has not been sufficiently emphasized, that violins outlast their players on earth by centuries. So far as duration in a physical environment is concerned, the minds or souls of the observers are continually vanishing away, while stocks and stones endure or, although they suffer change, obey the laws of physical conservation. The world is in a state of great intellectual confusion as to the meaning of this apparent reversal of values; but there is nevertheless a great consilience of intuitions, if not of inductions, which suggest the explanation that all life is for unseen ends, and that minds and souls are on their way elsewhere. Even when he seems most still, Man is for a distant city; and, in his deepest physical sleep, he is journeying home. His true humility lies not in any deference to wood and stone or physical magnitudes, but in the realization that their significance is imparted, can only be imparted, by the ultimate source of all values, the Logos of God, which speaks to him through all those co-ordinated phenomena.

Apart from all this, on the physical side itself, there is less ground than is commonly supposed to-day for abandoning the idea that man may still be the "measure of things." He stands midway, as Pascal suggested, between the infinitely great, and the infinitely little. If we consider the amazing complications of the nervous system, and the two hundred and fifty thousand fibres in



the optic nerve for instance, each one of which is "capable of innumerable degrees of sensation," and if we translate these fibres into terms of the incalculable constellations of organized electrons which went to their construction, the spaces and quantities of astronomy begin to dwindle before the complications and subtleties of physiology. The highly organized animal frame is not less wonderful than the looser structure of some deaf and blind constellation, though the latter may occupy more space. "A thought, the wonder of wonders, occupies no space at all, and is not measurable by any physical standard. We may, therefore, feel it doubly irrational to depreciate human values by comparison with mere physical vastness; and we must look, with a far deeper sense of awe, for the true ground of our humility elsewhere.

If man is to be dwarfed, then, he must be dwarfed by comparison with intellectual or spiritual beings.

Dr. Barnes, dealing recently with the question whether there are other inhabited worlds than ours, remarked that "In the depths of space there were millions of universes similar to ours, in each of which there might be a thousand or a million planetary systems. Was it likely that our earth was the only member of any planetary system on which intelligent life had appeared? It was surely beyond the limits of probability that a cosmos so vast should have in it but one planet, otherwise in no way exceptional, on which life had appeared.

"He (the Bishop) postulated that, not as a supernatural act, but as the result of a divine activity which continually created, the living emerged from the non-living

when the cooling earth was ready to support life. Material conditions on the cooling earth must have been paralleled a vast number of times in the history of the universe; and, on each occasion, we might assume that life had been created.

"Many such planets must have been formed thousands of millions of years before our earth, and he judged that elsewhere the mental, moral and spiritual attainments of living organisms must far surpass that reached on earth by men. But he doubted whether we had any reason to assume that elsewhere there had normally been a process of physical development parallel to that of earth. Quite possibly animal types which would appear to us strange and unpleasing carried the highest kinds of intelligence in distant worlds. If intelligent life existed and was progressive elsewhere in the universe, there was no reason why contact with it should not ultimately be made."\*

The ideas thus expressed by Dr. Barnes are, of course, familiar to most of us at the present day, and with many of those ideas we may agree, though it is difficult to understand the distinction he makes between the "supernatural" and "a divine activity continually creating." It is hardly to be supposed that Dr. Barnes identifies this "divine activity" (continually creating plus out of minus) with Nature, in the scientific sense of that misused word, or that he identifies the eternal and unknowable God with Nature. He does, however, almost imply this in the sentence which suggests that the "divine activity"

\* *Times* report, Oct. 21st, 1933.

creates life automatically, on all occasions when a certain physical temperature is reached on a cooling planet. His thought, on these points, appears to have out-run the evidence of Science and to be a little confused; for it is difficult to see how the "divine" (which cannot be identified with "Nature") comes into the matter at all. It is difficult to see how these physical processes can even be related to any creative and transcendent Spirit above and beyond Nature if, in the same breath, he denies that those relations involve anything transcendent, and insists on an automatism to which even the spirit of man, for good or evil, is superior. Perhaps the best commentary upon it is the affirmation of Spencer that, ultimately, everything rests upon the super-natural. The whole scheme of things is so mysterious that if Dr. Barnes, in the interests of religion, thinks he can lift the burden and the weight of all this unintelligible world, by asserting that the existence of a stupendous cosmos (where there might simply have been nothing at all) together with its entire dependence upon a transcendent creative Spirit, or eternal, self-sufficient uncaused Cause, is entirely "natural", he is welcome to the word. His "economy" may be a wise method of approach to certain contemporary minds; but we must still turn to Spencer's great chapter on the Unknowable for an elucidation of the word "natural," and to Carlyle's magnificent chapter on "natural-super-naturalism" for the whole truth about it.

There are many assumptions in the passage quoted above from Dr. Barnes. Not only does he destroy the distinction between God and the necessity of the materialists,

a necessity which, at certain temperatures, would automatically create life. He suggests that even the witness of beauty may be put to confusion. He does not explain why the physical should take its own wild way in the superior planets, while their intelligences, on the other hand, may be more or less true to the type we know, or (as old-fashioned, and not at all superstitious followers of Plato might say) made "in the image of God," and even able to communicate with us. But it is improbable that creatures of surpassing spiritual beauty should seem repulsive to us. It is much more probable that *we* should seem repulsive to *them*. This, at any rate, would be more to the modest point of the argument. If Dr. Barnes is right, and communication is ever established, it will be interesting to see which will convert the other. Let us hope that the television of the future will be diplomatically adapted to obliterate the unpleasant animal features on both sides.

If, as Hegel said, in his *Philosophy of Religion*, "beauty is merely the spiritual making itself known sensuously," we may also hope that spiritual beings, capable of communicating with one another on the common ground of intelligence, may have some common appreciation of the attributes of God as imaged in the world around them. We may have enough faith in the absolute Source of all beauty, which is our common centre, to rest assured that in this closely knit and coherently organized cosmos, whose waves of light flash through it from end to end like ripples on a single pool, there is too great a unity of design for the physical embodiment of surpassing spiritual beauty to repel us. One cannot answer for Dr. Barnes, of

course, who feels a certain repugnance for St. Francis; and, if those superior creatures elsewhere are committed to any high form of sacramental religion, they may be a little daunted, on their side, by the uncompromising aspect of an ecclesiastic in whom so much of the sweetness and light of our planet has been concentrated. But it seems improbable that beauty which, in its essence, is one everywhere, should put us to confusion; or that its manifestations elsewhere should repel us any more than the appearance of a remote constellation repels us. Orion and Saturn with his rings are only instances of that strangeness which quickens rather than defeats our sense of beauty; and the divine similarity in all the difference of things appears in the Milky Way as clearly as in a field of flowers. The stars may differ from one another in glory, but it is a question of degree rather than of kind. They have a great family likeness, and light will still be light. If we could visit Hesperus on a fine summer evening, we might very well find flowers—unknown, but still flowers—and trees, unknown, but still trees—spreading their well-proportioned petals and boughs in the familiar sunlight, watered by dews, and swayed by breathing airs. Indeed, until I could answer the riddle as to “why Nature loves the number five,” I should not like to be too certain that, even on Hesperus, many flowers would not have five petals; and I should be willing to wager that if any creatures can rise into the air they will do it on wings, and that those wings will more or less balance one another. There are, in fact, many laws of order and proportion that must, throughout the universe,

confirm the intellectual laws of beauty; and if, as Dr. Barnes suggests, the intelligences of those different worlds may be capable of communicating with us, Man thus becomes once more a citizen of the cosmos.

These are airy speculations, but I am following a modernist and can be running little risk, therefore, of losing touch with earth. But now, one or two doubts arise, and they suggest, from a purely agnostic point of view, one or two questions. I have dwelt on the similarities that Dr. Barnes has overlooked, but there are possibilities of difference that he has overlooked also.

Is he quite sure that the intelligences in those alien and higher, but perhaps "repulsive" forms have the same senses as ourselves? If the physical forms have gone their own way, why should not the senses have gone their own way? Why should not the inhabitants of those other planets have ten or fifteen senses entirely different from ours? How then are they going to communicate with us? The plight of the blind man who thought that the colour scarlet must be like the sound of a trumpet would be nothing to ours, and theirs.

But there is a more deadly question, and I fear it may annihilate the whole of this vast imaginative fabric which Dr. Barnes and I have been building up so cheerfully together. Before we ask that question, it may be well to restate the grounds for asking it.

Dr. Barnes took considerable pleasure in reducing his university audience to insignificance by making a million million (assumed) planets wheel before them. One knows

that impressive hush. The audience shrinks. The speaker dilates. He reduced them to even greater insignificance by marshalling before them innumerable (assumed) thrones, dominations, principedoms, virtues, powers, the germs whereof had come into existence on those planets, at a certain temperature. Many of his hearers would suppose that, by these stupendous conceptions and figures, the central belief of Christendom (that the Creator became incarnate in human form on our insignificant earth) had been rendered utterly untenable and preposterous. There is "nothing exceptional about our planet." We can guess here what Dr. Barnes is quietly aiming at; but we may allow him all that he wants for the moment. He must be aware, of course, that modern men of science have laid great stress (from a purely scientific point of view) on the very exceptional conditions of this planet, conditions that, with all the immense figures of astronomy before them, they have yet ventured to assert may not have occurred anywhere else in the cosmos. At the same time, with far less knowledge than theirs, I have always felt the improbability that Dr. Barnes feels, and my intuitions—for what they are worth—tell me that, so far, he is justified in his assumption. But his postulate for the dwarfing of man nevertheless remains an assumption.

His courage, as I have already noted, in asserting that life originally emerged from lifeless matter, goes far beyond the evidence of contemporary science which, up to the present, on grounds that Dr. Barnes would appreciate, has not seen fit to fall back on "divine activity" as

an explanation of the parthenogenesis of nations from a fiery cloud of gas drifting about in space and throwing off smaller portions of itself to "cool" into planets. Yet, here again I had always felt, against the most emphatic declarations of Pasteur and Huxley, the same improbability that Dr. Barnes feels; and my intuitions told me that the evolutionary process, whether we regard it as a manifestation of the divine activity or not, was continuous. But, again, this was, and is, an assumption.

And now, on this astronomical matter, when Dr. Barnes speaks of millions of millions of planets, he again shows his courage; for, of those planets, astronomy knows absolutely nothing. The only planets we know are those connected with our own solar system. Astronomers count their "stars"—many of them no more than immense clouds of fiery vapour—by millions, it is true. They are what we call the "fixed stars." The diameter of Betelgeuse, we are told, is equal to that of our whole solar system. It sounds less impressive when it is added that the "giant star" consists entirely of hydrogen gas. If other "fixed stars" have planets, shining by reflected light, we can know nothing of them at those incalculable distances. We only guess at their existence.

"Planets," says Sir James Jeans, "are very rare. They come into being as the result of the close approach of two stars, and stars are so sparsely scattered in space that it is an inconceivably rare event for one to pass near to a neighbour. Yet mathematical analysis shows that planets cannot be born except when two stars pass within about three diameters of one another. As we know how the stars



are scattered in space we can estimate fairly closely how often two stars will approach within this distance of one another. The calculation shows that, even after the star has lived its life of millions of millions of years, the chance is still a hundred thousand to one against its being a sun surrounded by planets."

If it is all a question of "chance" or physical coincidences, it need hardly be pointed out that the adverse chances are inconceivably multiplied by taking into account all the further conditions that may be required for the development of high forms of intelligent life. Even with the aid of the hundred-inch telescope at Mount Wilson, we cannot ascertain whether such planets exist at all. Dr. Barnes assumes it, as a kind of necessary truth, because it leads him in the way he wants to go. But again it is an assumption.

He says that the opposite assumption would involve "inconceivable waste" on the part of Almighty God. There was once an economical man who looked at Niagara, and talked of "water-rates." "Waste" of lifeless matter is an odd idea to connect with the Creator. On the other hand, Dr. Barnes hastens to safeguard himself against any repudiation of the waste of Nature; for she, as we all know, "of fifty seeds often brings but one to bear"; and this argument, though it contradicts the first, also leads him in the way he wants to go.

And now I come to the question. Dr. Barnes said that "many such planets must have been formed thousands of millions of years before our Earth," and he judged that "elsewhere the mental, moral and spiritual attainments of

living organisms must far surpass that reached on Earth by man."

The question is this, and it is final. If Dr. Barnes, at this moment, were an inhabitant of the most exalted of those other spheres—let us call it X—would not precisely the same reasoning compel him to survey the star-sprinkled skies and use exactly the same argument: "Many such planets must have been formed millions of millions of years ago?" Would he not, for exactly the same reasons, be forced to conclude that "elsewhere the mental, moral and spiritual attainment of living organisms must far surpass even that reached on X by its most advanced inhabitants?"

And this is not all. Having dwarfed man, and the superior inhabitants of X, by his use of large numbers, why should he stop at a million million planets? He has all time and all space to play with. Why not a million million millions? Why not trillions of trillions of planets? And trillions of trillions of years of progress among the superior beings? And if, again, we transfer him to the most exalted of those spheres, would not exactly the same reasoning compel him to precisely the same words once more: "Many such planets must have been formed, . . . inconceivable waste . . . Almighty God. . . . Elsewhere, the mental, moral and spiritual attainments must far surpass. . . ." And, if our Space in some inconceivable fashion comes to an end, why not other Spaces of other kinds elsewhere? And, if it does not come to an end, why not go on for ever till (as the stone flung to an infinite distance hits you in the back) you find yourself on earth

again and realize that you cannot be dwarfed by your own intellectual conceptions? If man and his planet could be reduced to insignificance by sheer weight of numbers in this fashion, and the easy assumption of their spiritual result elsewhere, there is no escape from the relentless logic which carries the reduction still further. Why should Dr. Barnes begin with planets produced a mere thousand million years ago? Did the "divine activity" begin to function then for the first time? And how are we to fix the exact degree of insignificance to which man is entitled to reduce his own world? Is he not, like Alice, nibbling at a mushroom which will extinguish him and his significance altogether—nay, will extinguish the significance of any greatness you like to mention—unless he quickly nibbles at the other side and regains that central position in the realm of values (as opposed to quantities) which he holds by virtue of his reason (that image of the Logos), his power to rise to a conception of the totality of things, and his personal apprehension of God.

The "modern" sense of the relationship of "small" and "large" in the physical world, "modern," yet older than Plato—should give a finer point to Rousseau's remark that "*il n'y a pas un être dans l'univers qu'on ne puisse, à quelque égard, regarder comme le centre commun de tous les autres.*" But, even in the post-Copernican universe, and in face of the astronomical figures which have so confused the contemporary mind, the place of man has a more absolute centrality of its own.

We have already seen that unless there be other and greater intelligences elsewhere (of which Science at

present cannot speak) man is the only being capable of co-ordinating and mastering those very figures; the only being in whom the idea of the universe as a whole has been focused into any significance whatsoever. The phrase *homo mensura*, so far from losing any of its ancient meaning, seems thus to have taken on a new intellectual majesty. In any case, Science, agnostic Science, for all its immense plunges into space and time has no shadow of a suggestion as to the nature of any other creatures elsewhere who may be capable of immeasurably surpassing its own intellectual achievements, or of throwing any light on its own riddles. It always seemed to me inconceivable that among the innumerable systems, our own solar system (and one planet in that system) should be the only centre of intelligence. But this is an entirely different question from that of the physical magnitudes by which, in the common argument, the stature of man has been reduced to insignificance. All the spiral nebulae rolled into one cannot equal the wonder of a single conscious mind. They cannot reduce to insignificance the least touch of kindness between one human being and another, or the intelligible light of the first faint smile of recognition in a child's eyes. Nor can they cancel the absolute imperatives of conscience. If there be finite intelligences elsewhere and the common argument of physical magnitudes be true, it would crush their values as it has crushed our own, unless we are prepared to assume that those intelligences have indeed become "as gods." In this case, we should be in the odd position of adopting a kind of stellar polytheism in order to rob

man of his own divine possibilities. There may be spheres inhabited by forms of life inferior to man. There may be other spheres inhabited by creatures far above him in knowledge and control of their physical environment. But, if so, our human Science with all its webs of observation has caught no inkling of it. The actual evidence, as far as it goes, is against it. How is it that after these thousands of millions of years, in which the superior planets, according to Dr. Barnes, have progressed so far beyond our own, we are not aware of results? Are they waiting for us to take the initiative in the communication which he suggests? We are cut off as no other creatures are cut off from the stages above us. When have we been startled, as the sparrows are startled by strange engines in the air? What incomprehensible signals have we seen? What strange sounds of music have been heard in the stillness of the night, relayed to us by instruments gloriously independent of our own, instruments that should be capable of flinging their melodies across the Milky Way as easily as our little rockets fling their coloured stars above the clouds. The questions are fantastic enough; but, if mankind is to be dwarfed into insignificance by assumptions, we may as well ask for signs that the assumptions are true. If, for instance, the vastness of the physical universe within our own mental vision forces us to conclude that it must be inhabited by intelligences infinitely more worthy of it than man, intelligences compared with which the human race is a mere flock of sparrows, then—just as the sparrow's life is interrupted by aeroplanes, rockets, guns, and distribution of bread-

crumbs there ought to be thousands of higher, but analogous, interruptions of our boasted reign of law. Our history ought to be full of incomprehensible apparitions; and the solemn fact remains that man, standing on a summit, can see nothing beyond him, even in those vast spaces, but the rhythmical sequences of physical law. Even his comets are calculable, and though he cannot catch a falling star, he knows enough about it to be quite certain that he is not staring like the ant or the fly at a lighted cigarette end flung from the hand of some superior being who walks in a divine garden over his head.

If anything in his world is diminished by comparison with the physical magnitudes above him it is the physical earth under his feet, not the unextended and imponderable majesty of thought which, here or elsewhere, revolves on its own eternal centre. The laws of reason deliver us, not only from blind instinct and caprice, but also from the bondage of the elements and the reign of relativity. They have a universal validity; and they are capable of pronouncing absolute judgments.

If those other intelligent beings exist (as I believe they must) it appears that they share our limitations. Our agnosticism with regard to them must be complete. We know infinitely less about them than Spencer knew about his Unknowable and Supreme Power. Man alone, in all the vast universe with which he is acquainted, is completely out of touch with any finite creature higher than himself; and, unless there be a God, no other being that he knows can survey and co-ordinate the vast universe which has convinced him of his futility. He stands on

the edge of a sundering gulf completely out of proportion to those which separate all other creatures from each other and from himself, and he can discover not the faintest sign of any other creature who can envisage that gulf or gaze into its depths.

It is often suggested that, as the lower animals are to man, so is man to some undefined greatness elsewhere that dwarfs his stature. But though the dog sees only a very little of man's true nature, it can look into man's face; while man with all his intelligence and all his conquests over time and space has only an empty sky above him. He looks and looks with an eternal hunger and he sees—nothing.

“Still the foiled earnest ear is deaf, and blind  
Are still the eluded eyes.”

A few birds and beasts are capable, apparently, of loving him. Others are frightened of him. But man himself—their head—is, in a sense too fearful for pride, the roof and crown of things; and he stares out into infinitude, from “the shore that has no shore beyond it.”

What is the meaning of this abrupt end to the long graduated series of life? Even if men were divided from the next physical grade above them by a gulf as great as that between the ant and the gardener who tramples upon it, we must still remember that, so far as physical magnitudes are concerned, man has instruments, powers and methods of detecting objects at distances almost immeasurably greater in proportion than those which divide ants from men. We think not only in years, but in

light-years; and, while the distance between ants and men is filled by myriads of more or less observable grades (the blind mole who pokes his nose into an ant-hill, for instance, and interrupts the whole ant-routine), man detects nothing in the wide hollowness above him but the glittering "armies of unconquerable law." All the proportions of the comparison are thus thrown out completely, and by amounts that are quite incalculable. No heavy foot descends from heaven to crush his roof. No gigantic hand places him under a microscope. Nor does anything happen to him in the merely physical world that can be remotely compared with these things. His physical disasters are of another order. He knows the causes of his earthquakes. They are produced by the will of no finite creature; and he can foretell his eclipses a thousand centuries in advance. The fly can enter the houses of men and crawl over their artificial ceilings; but man whose thought and imagination can formulate the idea of an eternal, omnipresent God, can find no trace of an intelligence, no shadow of any living creature that can come between himself and That.

His rank in Nature seems, therefore, to be far higher than that assigned to him by Pascal. The famous passage in which Pascal so brilliantly exposed the fallacious dwarfing of man in his own day was just and true as far as it went, and it has even more significance in these days when Pascal's vision of the "infinitely little" has been so amazingly confirmed. Pascal seemed to be almost prophetic when he declared that the smallest particle we could descry contained all he could conceive as existing



in infinite space. "An infinity of systems, each with its firmament, its planets, its earth, in the same proportions as the visible universe. In this minim we find animals, and even mites, consisting of a similar variety of parts, and these again capable of subdivision without cessation and without end." His argument was that the infinite series below us equalled the infinite series above us, and that man therefore occupied the central place, between the two extremes; a nonentity as contrasted with infinity; a universe as contrasted with nonentity. His question, therefore, was somewhat different from ours; for his "infinity" was not merely physical. It included the idea of God. But he made it quite clear that it depended upon our own mood rather than upon our reason if we chose to deprive man of his kingdom, and diminish his true stature.

If the modern sense of relativity has nothing else to teach us, it might at least confirm the three warnings of Pascal: "It is dangerous to show man in how many respects he resembles the inferior animals, without pointing out his grandeur. It is also dangerous to direct his attention to his grandeur without keeping him aware of his degradation. It is still more dangerous to leave him ignorant of both."

Of these warnings, the first and third are those which are chiefly disregarded to-day, and the result has been an increasing sense of the futility of human existence, and the ultimate unimportance of anything that we do or leave undone. "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, they kill us for their sport," and "Let us eat and drink, for

to-morrow we die," are conclusions hardly to be wondered at in such cases; though, if they ever came to be generally accepted, the best part of our civilization would perish.

A very common mood to-day is that which suggests that the physical insignificance of the earth is an argument against the Christian scheme in particular, and indeed against any idea that the Almighty and Infinite God can possibly be interested in anything so physically minute; and this again takes an unfair advantage of the humility of man in order to inhibit the reply. But the individual may defend the values of others even when he shrinks from asserting his own. It would be enough to remember the fine saying of Galileo, that we impose limits on the infinite power of God when we believe that the enormous dimensions of the universe render his universal activity impossible. "The sun shines on the grapes and ripens them, as if it had nothing else whatever to do," he said, "and in the same way, God can care for every individual, though his universe be infinite." Indeed, from the point of view of any philosophy of real values the argument from physical magnitudes against the Christian scheme will not bear serious examination. It misses the whole meaning of the scheme, which involved just this descent of the Creator from the heights to the depths, through all His worlds; this complete rounding of the circle; this consummation of infinitude in a union of extremes. What may have happened, or may even now be happening in other worlds, we do not know; but the suggestion that Orion or Aldebaran might have offered a

more majestic physical stage for the divine humility indicates a complete confusion of ideas. It misses even the symbolical significance of the divine birth among the beasts in an outlying manger. It misses the whole point of the plain narrative, whether it be true or false, that the palace was hostile; the simplest house was insecure; and there was no room at the Inn. It misses the whole point of the philosophy, which involved just that stooping from the heights to the depths. It was on these very points that the moral sublimity and spiritual beauty of the whole story turned, and to suggest that a physically larger stage would have been more appropriate is—to say the least of it—naïve.

There is no more coincidence between physical and spiritual centres than between physical quantities and spiritual values. A child is of greater value and *nearer* to God than all the fiery vapours of all the suns.

The argument set forth above, therefore, points to a more positive conclusion as to "Man's place in Nature." It shows him, at the end of a long line of development, leading apparently to no higher creature beyond, but—as Huxley pointed out—turning the laws of the material world back upon themselves. It shows him rolling back the waves of the Red Sea of Nature, by his own strange imperatives, and declaring, on certain occasions, that right is right, though all the physical forces of the world combine to crush him. It shows him waiting through the centuries, in an awful isolation, for justification by some higher law; and, if his Deliverer or his Messiah has not been revealed to him, it shows him, again and again,

still acting as though the noblest hypothesis must be true.

If there be a God, it is not unreasonable to suppose further that He might be more fully revealed in a living personality, such as we have described, than in the blind forces of Nature. There are degrees of truth in the talk about finding God in a whispering cornfield. It seems at least likely that the higher we go in the scale of being the more likely we are to find Him; and that He might be found more perfectly in the breaking of bread with One who could whisper articulately, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

These considerations which are confirmed by every modern exploration of the realm of values, lend a new reasonableness (we might almost say an evolutionary reasonableness) to the Christian idea of a spiritual ascent to a higher order and the communion of God with man. Apart from this clue, the line of man's evolution seems to end meaninglessly, not only in the air, but at the brink of an immeasurable gap in Nature.

The final word on this matter, as on so many others, for the evolutionist, no less than for the Christian, might well be found in St. Augustine: "We have begun to be some great thing. Let no man despise himself. We were once nothing, but we are something."

"We have said: 'Remember that we are dust'; but out of the dust He made man, and to dust He gave life, and in Christ he hath brought this dust to the Kingdom of Heaven, He who made Heaven and earth."

There, and there alone, among all the philosophies,

was a suggestion of what might be the absolute centre of all our relativities.

“‘Where,’ said the King, ‘O where? I have not found it!’

‘Here,’ said the dwarf, and music echoed ‘here!’

This infinite circle hath no line to bound it,

Therefore its deep strange centre is everywhere!”

Light is light wherever it shines; and no matter how it be broken into separate gleams it is still *lumen* and *lumine*. If there be intelligences in other worlds the fact that we know nothing of their place in the divine scheme is no argument against the place of man in that scheme. It may be that, as the one small altar-light burns before ten thousand shrines on earth, it also burned, in far different ways perhaps, and before altars of a very different design, in myriads of worlds elsewhere. But if this universe, by any chance, were an incarnational system with a sacramental significance, we need look no further than Shakespeare’s estimate of man, in his misery and grandeur, to realize that this “quintessence of dust,” and “paragon of animals,” might have a central position of its own; might indeed be bounded in a nutshell and count itself the king of infinite space.

If, as the old wisdom had it, the circle being infinite, the centre is everywhere, and the circumference nowhere, the intellect—in this imperfect image of omnipresence—had its answer to the “defeatism” induced by the Copernican theory.

“What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form, in moving, how express

and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!"

If these words of Hamlet even approximate to the truth (and every one of them should be weighed, for all the passion of Shakespeare breathes through them) the union of so much grandeur with the misery which he also expresses does receive at least a glimmer of light from the philosophy of Christendom. It is at least reasonable to suppose that if any divine illumination were to shine upon the up-struggling life of earth it would be manifested through this strange being, in whom alone the beauty and the meaning of the universe were intelligently focused. If the "values of God" were to be born here at all, the realism of the Christian philosophy was not to be despised; and the suggestion of Browning, our profoundest seer since Shakespeare himself, was at least a working hypothesis:

"God may have other words for other worlds;  
But for this world of ours His word is Christ."



## CHAPTER XVIII

*The movements that he saw he could but judge  
By some fixed point in space. He chose the sun.  
Could this be absolute? Could he then be sure  
That this great sun did not, with all its worlds,  
Move round a deeper centre? What became  
Of your Copernicus then? Could he be sure  
Of any unchanging centre, whence to judge  
This myriad-marching universe, but one—  
The absolute throne of God.*

WATCHERS OF THE SKY





## CHAPTER XVIII

COMMON as the argument for man's insignificance has become at the present day, there is nothing new about it. The Copernican and Darwinian theories gave it a new opportunity; but at the same time they obviously strengthened, by their own grandeur, the reply of *homo mensura*. The reply, as usual, may take a little time to overtake the quick and superficial falsehood; but, seventeen hundred years ago, Origen examined and destroyed precisely the same argument as it came from the lips of Celsus; and Celsus is remembered to-day only because he is embalmed like a gnat in the lucid and glowing amber of Origen's master-piece.

"Celsus is not ashamed to say 'Come now, if one were to look down from heaven upon earth, in what respect would *our* actions appear to differ from those of ants and bees?' " . . .

"But it is absurd," Origen continues, "to suppose that he who looks from heaven upon earthly things would desire to look from such a distance upon the *bodies* of men and ants, and would not rather consider the nature of the guiding principles, and the source of impulses, whether that be rational or irrational. And if he once look upon the source of all impulses, it is manifest that he would behold also the difference which exists, and the supe-

riority of man, not only over ants, but over elephants. For he who looks from heaven will see among irrational creatures, however large their bodies, no other principle than, so to speak, irrationality; while among rational beings he will discover reason, the common possession of men, and of divine and heavenly beings, and perhaps of the supreme God Himself, on account of which man is said to have been created in the image of God, for the image of the supreme God is his reason." (*The Logos.*) It is through reason, whose laws are universal, that man escapes the bondage of the elements, and it is through the Logos, in exactly the same way, that he rises to communion with God. When Origen says that reason is "perhaps" possessed by God, he is merely hesitating, of course, as to whether the absolute light and immediate knowledge of God should not be likened to direct and complete vision rather than to the "discourse" of human reason, which moves from point to point, and sees only in part.

Many minds, in many centuries, appear to have arrived—often quite independently—at this sublime idea. Indeed it is often affirmed, as though it were a necessity of thought, by writers who appear to be unaware of the thoughts of others on that subject. St. Thomas Aquinas asserts it in his own learned and profound way, of course, but it is more to the immediate point that Galileo should have stated it in the less spiritual terms of his own new science. Speaking of mathematical knowledge he echoed the great saying of Kepler with regard to his astronomical laws, "Almighty God, these are Thy thoughts. I am thinking after Thee"; and he then went

on to say that what our human minds think successively, advancing laboriously from conclusion to conclusion, God knows through simple intuition (*di un semplice intuito*, immediately, not *con discorsi*). It is to this that he attributes the difficulty with which the human mind comes to understand the processes which are accomplished with so much ease in Nature, whether it be the ripening of a bunch of grapes by the sun, or the deeper and subtler process of which he used that beautiful physical analogy—the care of individual souls, in an immense universe, by a constant omnipresent spiritual Light. In both cases he was leading up to the real presence of that Light (*lumen de lumine*) by the superb affirmation, from which not an atom in the cosmos can escape: *pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua*.

Except that he leads up to this conclusion by mathematical considerations, Galileo is at one with Origen here; and he is equally at one, across the centuries, with Rousseau, who also takes the conclusion as a kind of necessity of thought:

*“La suprême Intelligence,”* he says, *“n’a pas besoin de raisonner; il n’y a pour elle ni prémisses ni conséquences, il n’y a pas même de proposition: elle est purement intuitive, elle voit également tout ce qui est et tout ce qui peut être; toutes les vérités ne sont pour elle qu’une seule idée, comme tous les lieux un seul point, et tous les temps un seul moment. La puissance humaine agit par des moyens, la puissance divine agit par elle-même. Dieu peut parce qu’il veut; sa volonté fait son pouvoir.”*

There is not a clause in this passage, for all its Gallic clarity of statement, that does not open an abyss of

thought, and yet—probably—the majority of religious minds, no matter how simple, would recognize in it the perfect expression of their own unformulated, but direct spiritual perceptions. It illuminates the ideas of omnipresence and omniscience, providence, foreknowledge, and—most important of all—shows their perfect interdependence, organically connecting them also with many other ideas which—if the agnostics are right—must be predicated of their Unknowable. It fits perfectly, for instance, into Spencer's demand that his Unknowable must be regarded as "supra-rational" as well as "supernatural" and omnipresent, and it co-ordinates this "supra-rationality," omnipresence, and transcendence of Time, with other attributes also postulated by the agnostics.

More important even than this, it is in complete harmony with page after page in St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. The latter, for instance, in his great letter to Volusianus, after pointing out that no material body can be in its entirety everywhere, but must have one part here and another there, and occupy some place, goes on to show that this is not the nature of the soul. "And how much more different must be the nature of God, who is the Creator of both soul and body! God is not said to fill the world in the same way as water, air, and even light occupy space, so that with a smaller or a greater part of Himself he occupies a smaller or greater part of the world. He is able to be everywhere present in the entirety of His being; He cannot be confined in any place; He can come without leaving the place where He was. He can

depart without forsaking the place to which He had come."

He then illustrates this by the analogy of certain mysteries within the mind of man himself. "Are not the stars in heaven very remote from his body? And yet does he not see the sun yonder. . . . We live beyond the limits of our bodies." And this last thought interlocks with the greatest thought of all, dispelling all those difficulties of the modern mind which arise from the crude idea that, in the Incarnation, the Godhead either relinquished or lost the administration of the universe, or transferred it to a child's body, on an insignificant planet. "He can come without leaving the place where He was. He can depart without forsaking the place to which He had come." And just as in man's will we see a faint and finite shadow of the originating uncaused Cause, so also in our own strange power to "live beyond the limits of our bodies," we have a faint image of His power who, still reigning in His eternal Kingdom, *propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem, descendit de coelis*.

There seems to be no direct connection between this and the lines of the seventeenth century contemplative, Traherne, about his own Spirit; and yet how one illuminates the other

"All my Mind was wholly everywhere.  
Whate'er it saw, 'twas actually *there*;  
The Sun, ten thousand Stages off, was nigh;  
The utmost Star  
Tho' seen from far  
Was present in the apple of mine eye. . . .

“O Wonder and Delight!  
O sacred Mystery  
My Soul a Spirit wide and bright,  
An Image of the Deity!  
A most substantial Light!  
*That* being Greatest which did Nothing seem!”

In every age there has been an amazing agreement of independent testimony to just this personal experience of a profound metaphysical truth. All the great contemplatives (the word “mystic” is too often misunderstood) arrive by different paths at various summits from which they all descry the same shining vision; and there is one stage at which they all declare, as a truth separately and personally perceived, that the centre of all things is within them; for the circle being infinite, the centre is everywhere, as God is wholly present everywhere. That so stupendous an idea—or even the analogy that illustrates it—could have been hit upon accidentally and independently by so many and various intelligences of all generations and that it should be unwittingly confirmed by so many intuitive gleams of vision in the poets appears unlikely, unless it represents, however faintly and inadequately, a real truth.

There is a passage in Plotinus which describes the very process whereby “each becomes all”; and Traherne seems to describe an actual experience of it in his own terms. There is only one real Centre.

“All by each, and each by all possest,” he says, “are intermutual joys beneath the sky.”

“This shows a wise contrivance, and discovers  
Some Great Creator sitting on the Throne  
That so disposeth things for all His Lovers  
That everyone might reign like God alone.”

What is this but the right interpretation of the so frequently misinterpreted truth that the Kingdom is within him and every man? But it is clear enough that Traherne experienced the truth quite independently, in a moment of personal ecstasy. Those profound unconscious agreements occur again and again, among the most various minds of the finest order and the most distant times and places. They interlock and fit, and give meaning to one another like fragments of the same design. The direct intuitions which lift untaught genius to the heights of philosophy and beyond them; the sudden illumination which reveals a universal law to the scientific discoverer, and shows him more in a single moment than he had learned from years of labour (as when Darwin, for instance, read a paragraph of Malthus and saw his whole theory in a single flash) the ecstatic vision of the contemplatives; the sudden splendours of “inspiration” in poet and prophet; the opening of “the gates of distance” among primitive peoples (as described in Lang’s *Making of Religion*), and even those mysterious instincts which seem to endow certain birds and insects with an unconscious share in a knowledge deeper than their own and more direct than the conclusions of reason, tiny and limited as their participation might be; all seemed to illustrate, like flying gleams, the nature of that divine “Light.”



"Light" is itself an instance of the strangely spontaneous agreement noted above. It has been used by innumerable minds, as various as those of Plotinus, Galileo, Milton and Shelley, to represent the unseen God to themselves.

'Hail, Holy Light, offspring of heaven first-born,  
Or of the Eternal co-eternal beam,

May I express thee unblamed, since God is Light.'

These lines are, after all, only a gloss on the phrase of the Nicene Creed, *lumen de lumine*.

A mind endeavouring to free itself from anthropomorphic limitations, and yet retain something more than an abstraction, could hardly find a more perfect adumbration than this—the beauty of Light, which is stainless wherever it shines; its power of being immediately present everywhere and revealing the significance of things, which makes it "the soul of the picture." Nevertheless, it could only be an adumbration; for all our light was still but a shadow of the Light that never was on sea or land.

## CHAPTER XIX

*He lives and reigns;  
Dies with the dying bird; and, in its death,  
Receives it to His heart. No leaf can fall  
Without Him; who, for ever pouring out  
His passion into worlds that shall attain  
Love in the highest at last, returns for ever  
Along these roads of suffering and death,  
With all their lives upgathered to His heart  
Into the heaven of heavens.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH



## CHAPTER XIX

THE problem of evil has troubled the mind of man since first he began to reflect on human destiny; and there is perhaps no problem which, through all the ages of its discussion, has been treated so irrationally or been wrapt in so much intellectual confusion. Physical suffering, mental suffering, moral evil, and the shadow of death, have all been regarded as part of a single indictment against the government of the universe. Either not good, the charge runs, or else not all-powerful; and even in the preliminary stages of this indictment there is often a radical confusion.

Physical pain, in its attacks upon the innocent, is not the darkest aspect of the problem. Few thinkers would regard it as comparable in difficulty with the problem of moral evil, the brutalization of the mind and the degradation of the spirit, the results of which are often visited upon the innocent also, and in more terrible ways. The modern world has made no new discovery here.

Ibsen's *Ghosts* was anticipated thousands of years ago by the lawgiver who spoke of the sins of the fathers and their visitation upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation.

Nothing is more characteristic of a certain kind of modern shallowness than its attacks upon religious philosophers for their recognition of the harsh facts of the

world in which we actually live. It would seem that certain popular novelists really believe that the ancient law-giver invented the facts as well as the statement in which he tried to account for them and reduce them to law. They seem to think that if the austere "religion" were abolished, the austere facts would vanish out of the physical universe, and that, as the Victorian rebel chanted, the roses would grow rosier

"And bluer the sea-blue stream of the bays."

But by abolishing the religion they do not abolish the facts. Rightly or wrongly they merely destroy the only clue that we ever had to a meaning. Moreover, if there be anything unworthy of the modern mind in the idea of "original sin" (a doctrine in which Hegel found unsuspected depths), there is at least this much to be said for it, that it attempted to explain something which did seem to be wrong in the affairs of mankind, and that it involved the idea of a freedom in which men were something more than puppets or cogs in a blindly moving mechanism. As restated by Hegel, in his philosophy of history, it illuminates the whole history of man. Until I had absorbed Hegel's remarks on that subject, the doctrine seemed to me to be incapable of restatement for the modern mind. But I recognized that, so far as man was concerned, if we denied his freedom, and the consequent power to prefer evil, which came into his life with the first awakening of the conscious self that separates him from the brutes, we again robbed ourselves of the only clue to certain harsh facts of the world around us. The clue may be faint.

Its end may be wrapped in mystery. It may have been delivered in poetical language, suited to those primitive people and those children who are so often nearer to reality than ourselves. But it did contain the hint of a real meaning, and was capable of being caught up and described by the greatest of all the critics of philosophy as "the eternal history of spirit."

The vital significance which modern thinkers of the calibre of Hegel found in it has not been considered at all by those writers of to-day, who have thrown it aside so contemptuously. They have judged it, as they have judged many other interdependent articles of the Christian philosophy, in complete innocence. In this matter, at any rate, they have neither eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, nor lost their Edens. They have judged the greatest philosophy the world has ever known from vague nursery recollections of earlier things told them in their infancy about religion. They are totally unaware of the outstanding minds of living men—from Karl Adam in Germany to Maritain in France—by whom the philosophy of Christendom is being elucidated to-day. But having abolished the only clue we ever had to the meaning, they have only made the harsh facts darker and harsher. The comparatively innocent brutes of the jungle have no power for evil like that of the "men like gods" who, having tasted knowledge, are inventing new poison-gases for the next war against their own kind.

There is a certain irony in the fact that it has been reserved for our own age to claim that all this throws no light on the suffering of the innocent brute creation;

for if we have indeed discovered that we are members one of another (as the old religion told us), and if we have indeed discovered that higher forms have emerged from lower forms of life, there is more evidence than we thought of a consecutive and rational process even in this matter. The development of sensitive nerves in the earlier brute creation may be regarded as a necessary preliminary to creatures capable of all the joys and sorrows of the Ninth Symphony. This is no argument for indifference to the sufferings of that innocent underworld. It is rather a plea for something like reverence as we confront it. But there is no question whatever that there is a consecutive process and that the capacity for suffering increases as we ascend in the hierarchy of Nature. It is doubtful whether there is more suffering in the lower stages than the minimum required for protective or warning purposes.

It is impossible to say how much we owe to the protective function of pain, the quick warning of the nerve that drops a sheath over the human eye, instantly, at a flash of lightning or the first wind-driven grain of the sand-storm. It is a commonplace of the physiologists that, if those sentinels of pain were to lose their keenness, the delicate fortress of the body would speedily be wrecked by a thousand enemies. Without it, the tender fabric of the eye would be ruined; the frame of every active youth would be torn to pieces before he suspected danger and the child who went out blackberrying would return with its flesh in tatters. Those agnostics who dare to say that the unknown end of the whole scheme is not worth the

cost and that it might have been achieved in a better way are daring indeed. It has been suggested that the pain involved is "in excess of the minimum required for warning purposes"; but the determination of the exact "minimum" required for all cases and all emergencies in a gradually developing universe where there may be other important purposes, as well as an immensely important element of contingency and freedom, would more wisely be left to that Unknowable and Supreme Cause so eloquently described in the agnostic philosophy of Spencer. The canon fixed by the Everlasting against self-slaughter has a defender with a flaming sword in the Angel of Pain, and in the fear He inspires. The "mild discomfort" which one "agnostic" recommended to the consideration of the Almighty might have been enough to warn those who had the power or the time to think, but might not be enough to prevent a fool from plunging his hands into molten lead, or to wake the sleeper who laid his arm across the camp-fire. If a burnt child did not dread the fire, many a child would dip its hands in oil and set them alight for amusement. Crude as these illustrations may be, is it not possible that in a profoundly interdependent scheme, they do represent some absolute necessity which even Omnipotence could not overcome without self-contradiction? Is it not possible that if the highest aims of that scheme were ever to be realized, a price had to be paid, of which the perfect example was lifted up, on the Cross whose arms point in opposite directions?

Is it not possible that if bodies were not made soft and



yielding, many other things would have to be eliminated, on pain of self-contradiction; until finally, if man were still to have his free-will and be capable of sin, the divine act of redemption, which could only take place through suffering, would have to be eliminated also? If there be any connection between these things, and there certainly is a profound connection in the Christian philosophy, it might perhaps be some consolation to the sufferer to realize that he shares in the divine act of atonement. He is helping to pay the price.

The sufferings inflicted by animals on one another are certainly less than the sufferings that man, of his own free-will, has often inflicted upon them. We cannot account for them, as a French wit has remarked, on the ground that their ancestors "had eaten forbidden hay." Neither, as an English writer remarked, can we criticize the lion for obtaining his meat in a probably far more merciful method than that whereby man obtains his chop. But animals do not seem to lack joy in their lives; and, while the greater part of the human race does enjoy its chop, and even bishops ask blessings on the meal, it seems to be mere cant to pretend that the human race has a right to criticize its Creator for the pain involved in the process. Mr. Thomas Hardy indulged in a great deal of this criticism; but he once informed me that he was not a vegetarian and that the animals' paradise he was planning would be chiefly for the uneatable.

A great deal of the questioning is made from very comfortable armchairs after a hearty meal on some portion of one of the animals chiefly concerned, and I could never

understand either the sceptic or the curate who, after quoting Blake's "Little lamb, who made thee," could go home to his roast shoulder and mint-sauce, and question the Creator's kindness for allowing him to do so. We are living in a weird universe, where—if we could see ourselves—stranger things happen than ever Dante dreamed of. We sustain ourselves, as a famous statement has it, by thrusting pieces of other animals into holes in our heads; and if this were even whispered to denizens of some other planets, they would probably ridicule the teller as hopelessly insane. Yet this weird system of transubstantiation whereby

"Whatever Miss T. eats  
Turns into Miss T"

is the most vivid fact of our lives; and, if it fails to startle us, it is only because custom lies heavy upon us, and we live and move and have our being in a somnambulistic routine.

But the problem of physical suffering (which I propose to take first) cannot be dismissed lightly; and I must confess, at the outset, that I have never been satisfied with the bland argument of philosophers, or the ardent proclamations of Browning, that

"The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound."

Long before Browning, the scholastics had affirmed with greater depth that *malum est privatio ordinis ad finem debitum*. But to the woman dying of cancer the words ring hollow and remit no pang. To say that evil is rela-

tive, while good is absolute, is all very well for the philosopher in his library. But most men would shrink from offering that wise remark as an anodyne to anyone who was actually being stretched on one of the many racks of this tough world. Certainly the maker of such a remark—unless he were very insensitive—would find it difficult to meet the patient gaze of any real victim.

It is more honest to face the facts without minimizing them; and there is a more possible answer in which my own mind rested, an answer which the philosophers have strangely neglected, perhaps because it was too simple for them. It is surely possible that these pangs of Nature may be the price that has to be paid for something else, something that could be achieved in no other way, without that self-contradiction which, as the philosophers themselves affirm, is impossible even to Omnipotence.

Omnipotence in the Creator does not imply, for instance, the power to make a thing entirely black and entirely white simultaneously. It is therefore surely possible that some profound contradiction may be involved in the idea that finely sensitive creatures might have been produced incapable of any but pleasurable sensations. If we can imagine such a creature, and compare it with the highest types of humanity, there is little doubt as to which will be the more admirable, and no doubt at all as to which will be the more lovable. It may be impossible, even for Omnipotence, without some fundamental self-contradiction, to evolve a race which, ignorant of suffering and unacquainted with grief, should also achieve the heights and sound the depths of intellectual

and spiritual life. It may be that those heights and depths are actually made up of the very experience which we would forego, and that there may be a deeper meaning than is always realized in the saying of the supreme victim and victor of suffering on earth: *I am the Way*.

We may conceive of a Virgil without the sense of tears; a Shakespeare, wandering through Arden, without a hint of tragedy; a Beethoven, untouched by compassion, in a world that had no need of it; but the thinkers and artists would be the very first to affirm that such a world had somehow lost all its greatness. What does this mean, this hesitation as to whether we could accept our own improved and extremely comfortable universe? Does it not again suggest that—dimly as we may apprehend it—we are here groping around some profound necessity which cannot be overcome, even by the Omnipotent, without self-contradiction?

Our riddle may not be answered, we may still be left with an utter mystery; but we are also left with a very positive truth, a truth which Christendom has taken to its innermost heart and made the corner-stone of its philosophy. If that philosophy were true, we should have some clue to the meaning of pain. The vision of "Nature red in tooth and claw" is not inconsistent with St. Paul's vision of a world groaning and travailing together, with Calvary as its culmination. If that philosophy of Christendom were untrue, the riddle would remain, and it would be still darker, for there is no other clue at all.

If it were true, it would be in perfect accord with the

other gleams of truth which had broken upon me along a thousand other lines of thought. It would confirm the hint that our experience here was a training for other ends elsewhere. It might mean that, in the final consummation, when the making of man was complete, and all his experience had become a part of him, colouring his mind, ingrained in his substance, there would be no more need for the sufferings in which he had been tempered than for the pangs in which he had been born. It might also mean that, just as on earth his own grief deepens his insight into the masterpieces of art, so—in another state—all he had learned in suffering would help him to enter into the beatific vision; all he had sown in tears would somehow there be restored to him in joy, as here on earth it is restored to the great artist or musician in beauty.

But we must not expect the fruit of a thousand ages to ripen in an hour. There is no weight in the common argument against the Christian religion that it did not, in some inconceivable way, burst upon the whole world, and on every race, and every individual, simultaneously. Time, as Lessing reminds us in his *Education of the Human Race*, is a necessary part of a creative process involving so many stages of development, and varieties of life. "Advance," says that great, but quite unorthodox critic, in one of his noblest passages, "advance at Thy imperceptible pace, eternal Providence. But let me not, because it is imperceptible, despair of Thee. Let me not despair of Thee, even if Thy steps should seem to me to go backwards! *It is not true that the straight line is always the shortest.*

*Thy eternal path Thou hast so much to bring with Thee, so  
v side-steps to take."*

Lessing saw clearly that this educational process was for the individual, not merely for the race, which is composed of individuals, and will one day perish from the earth. He also saw that the brevity of man's life on earth was utterly incompatible with his individual capacities, and was increasingly destructive of any real meaning in the educational process of the race itself, unless there were a reserve for the individual life. Browning's Grammarian only time to give us a very small part of his learning before he was dead from the waist down." The modern world, with its immensely increased opportunities, illustrates the problem more clearly than ever. Men are being crushed more and more crushingly by the lack of time. The time one life affords them for coping with all that they feel the need of learning and achieving. "Life piled on life is all too little." Lessing believed, therefore, that the individual continued his education; and, though his theory of the future life was Greek rather than Christian, it was at least, as far as it went, an "intimation of immortality." As far as it went, it confirmed the truth of another sense in the philosophy of Christendom—the belief in the immortality of the soul. It pointed at least to the coherence of that philosophy. If everything in that philosophy fitted the facts of life so perfectly that, at every turn, it found it solving our problems and giving a real significance to what was otherwise meaningless, it was not scientific to consider it as a hypothesis. Innumerable cases in the modern indictment of the universe depend

entirely on the single assumption that death is the end. This one assumption not only darkens the original riddle, but—if it be true—makes it impossible to believe in any ultimate principle of justice and mercy, such as the eloquence of Professor Huxley attributed to his "Eternal." It reduces the sublime evolutionary "purpose" in Darwin's "grand sequence of events" to a mocking farce. This elimination of purpose was to my mind the overwhelming argument against it.

We are all familiar with the argument that, in perishing completely, the human race might have the satisfaction (in imagination at least) of serving some loftier end elsewhere. It has been used, sometimes, by poets, not of the first order, as an inverted kind of self-flattery, a noble gesture at the expense of the forgotten and unknown. But it not only had all the glibness and emptiness which its users so commonly attributed to the believers in a future life—it actually evaded certain hard scientific facts, exactly as its users accused the Christian of evading facts. It is true, of course, that on our own planet, there are certain creatures which do appear to subserve others; but all these creatures are at least conscious of one another's existence, while Man, whose range of observation is incomparably wider, can discover nothing on the entire planet which his incomparably higher development (including his capacity to think or dream of God) can possibly subserve. Further than this, if he looks out through space to distances far beyond the little circle which his physical life or death could possibly affect in any way whatsoever, all the apparatus of his Science is

still utterly unable to discover anything, between his own intellect and the Mind of God, which his existence or obliteration could possibly subserve. If those who use the argument so vaguely will set their minds and imaginations to making it more definite, they will not find it easy even to adumbrate an "end" served by all the intellectual and spiritual struggles and agonies of the human race, if the physical end is final. The cool scientific mind would certainly not find it easy to imagine "ends" that were more than physical—in regions beyond our observation—if, at the same time, religious theories and the "things of the spirit" are to be disregarded on *a priori* grounds. On the other hand, if those mysterious "ends elsewhere" are merely physical, it is not only impossible to imagine how the life and death of Socrates in our slowly dying solar system could affect them, but the really greater is made subject to the less; the argument itself loses all coherence and meaning; and the Byronic sentimentalists who adopt it, with airs of so noble a renunciation, become utterly irrelevant. A squirrel might as well talk of serving the ends of a sun-spot.

A meaning and a purpose in the whole scheme of things was to me a postulate of thought. I could no more rid my mind of that idea, than I could open my eyes and refuse their direct vision. If the spiritual evolution of the race was a mockery, all meaning vanished; and a meaningless world, a purposeless world, would be just that and no more—purposeless and meaningless, for science as well as for the soul. I could not deceive myself by fine phrases about serving the ends of stocks and stones.



The overwhelming injustices of this world would be final and, being final, they would be appalling. There would be no further solution; no significance in the disciplinary process by which we had begun to learn so much; and we might well echo the epigram of Thomas Hardy on human life:

“A senseless school where we must give  
Our lives that we may learn to live.  
A dolt is he who memorizes  
Lessons that leave no time for prizes.”

The fact that, as Hardy himself repeatedly affirms, his own assumption reduces the whole scheme of things to an empty farce is perhaps no argument against its truth. But there is an ineradicable instinct in human nature which tells us that there is a great deal more in the matter than that. We cannot so easily say the last word about this unfathomable mystery; and, if there are two schemes of thought, two hypotheses, one of which reduces the whole of human life to utter futility and makes one end of good and evil, while the other does leave an open possibility of purpose and meaning, it seems only rational that we should choose the latter.

This was the argument of several poems which I wrote at a time when I was intellectually groping towards a conclusion that seems to me now as valid and rational as any other in science or philosophy. I can only look back upon its intuitive expression in verse with some curiosity, as one looks back upon youth's first misty glimmerings of the realities of adult life. If, in the poem of that name,

the *Open Door* were open only to faith (as I thought at the time), faith itself was only a readiness to trust the voice of reason, when it testified to things unseen. Faith of this kind, at least, was required of science itself, in every department.

“And since, without this dream  
No light, no faintest gleam  
Answers our ‘Why?’  
But earth and all its race  
Must pass and leave no trace  
On that blind sky;

Shall reason close that door  
On all we struggled for;  
Seal the soul’s doom;  
Make of this universe  
One wild unanswering curse,  
One lampless tomb?

Mine be the dream, the creed,  
That leaves for God—indeed,  
For God and man—  
One open door whereby  
To prove His world no lie,  
And crown His plan.”

But “dreams” were not in question. The alternatives were clear. Faith here was not merely a readiness to adopt the noblest hypothesis: it was a readiness to follow a road which was indicated to the reason by a thousand arrows, all pointing one way, and all confirming the

noblest hypothesis also. The choice lay between two schemes of thought, one of which allowed some meaning and purpose to human life, while the other destroyed it utterly and showed us by the light of the dying sun only the mocking and ghastly end of the whole human race and all its aspirations. Moreover, the former scheme was in perfect accord with other beliefs which also left the way open for future explanations of other problems, and this not in one or two cases, but in thousands of cases, while the latter scheme was inconsistent with itself, incompatible with the character of Professor Huxley's "Eternal," and completely contradictory of the values that Mr. Thomas Hardy, for instance, rated most highly (values that did mysteriously exist in himself and other men). We were bound, therefore, by every rule of science and philosophy, and every instinct of our nature, to choose the open way and make the former scheme at least our working hypothesis.

The suggestion relayed from Schopenhauer by the unreasoning human cry of Hardy—that the supreme Will is a blind and unconscious monster which has somehow evolved a feeling and thinking organism in Man, so that Man is almost infinitely superior to his own Creator, is perhaps another instance of the attempt to extract plus from minus. In one of its later developments—the "creative evolution" of Bergson—the cart is put before the horse in a way that makes nonsense of the whole scheme of things, but allows one to hope that the cart will one day back the horse into a clover-meadow. In the case of Thomas Hardy it led to a prayer (a prayer,

it must be noted, couched in the language of the old religion and addressed, apparently, to a nescient "Lord") that all things might relapse into nescience. This quite incoherent philosophy of gloom, as Meredith affirmed, could only tend to depress the vitality of the race, wherever it was mistaken for depth of thought.

"What's the use of anything?" was once a jest for sane humanity. Its serious adoption as the final word of modern thought would not only prove Meredith to be right, but would eventually wreck civilization. This may be no argument against it. Possibly, as Thomas Hardy once wrote to me, the whole truth might be too terrible even to think about. But if this be so, we may as well put our hands up at once. If the mere enunciation of a theory leads to the complete muddlement of such a prayer as that quoted above, in which a conscious being prays to an unconscious being, there is certainly good philosophical ground for doubting the truth of that theory. If, moreover, it destroys the real values of life, while an opposite theory is in accord with them from end to end, there is real philosophical ground for preferring the latter.

If, still further, there is good reason to suppose that the serious adoption of the first theory would slacken human effort in every direction, while the latter would foster it and give it a meaning and a purpose, there is again philosophical ground for at least adding this to all the other reasons for supposing the latter to be more in accord with the real truth. If, finally, the first theory renders the whole scheme of things incoherent and futile, and subordinates greater things to less, not in one, but in ten

thousand directions, while the contrary theory does exactly the opposite in every one of those directions, there is again almost overwhelming philosophical ground for supposing that the latter does accord more closely with the real truth.

It is interesting from this point of view to consider the assumptions and implications of a famous quatrain, which has been used with great unction by the opponents of the Christian philosophy:

“O thou, who man of baser earth didst make,  
And even with Paradise devise the snake,  
For all the sins wherewith the face of man  
Is blackened, man’s forgiveness give, and take.”

The emotional defiance of the last two words in that stanza is Byronic rather than intellectual; and they had an almost Byronic breadth of influence on more than one generation of young English men and women.

The poet assumes, in this case, that the Ruler of the universe is all-powerful (otherwise his indictment fails). In the word “devise” he proceeds, with a touch of bitterness, to beg another complicated philosophical question; and he hints, with emotional inconsistency, both at a cruel indifference and a predetermined helplessness on the part of that Ruler. Finally, and with some bitterness, he suggests that the human critic is the moral superior of his own Creator.

But he cannot have it all ways. In the same poem he describes man as an utterly helpless puppet; a ball tossed about at the whim of the unknown Player; and an insig-

nificant shadow-shape thrown upon a screen at a lantern-show, under the complete control of the omnipotent Operator. The control is internal as well as external.

"The ball no question makes of ayes or noes,  
But here and there, as strikes the Player, goes."

The ball is completely ignorant, but the Player, we are told, with the profound passion of great poetry, is omniscient:

"And He who tossed you down into the field,  
He knows about it all. He knows. He knows."

And then, in the very next breath, the poet shows you this puppet, this ball, this insignificant and utterly ignorant wraith, suddenly endowed with the stupendous power of rising up in judgment against the whole scheme of things, through all the length and breadth of the starry universe and through all the intellectual heights and depths of heaven and hell. He shows us this utterly ignorant atomy, in its helpless passivity, suddenly taking its throne amongst the thunders, and not only proclaiming itself the moral superior of that very almighty and all-knowing Power which (*ex hypothesi*) "devised" the scene and inspired the proclamation, but also flinging its bitter "take," with a gesture of contempt, into the face of the supreme Giver.

Who gave the will of man that awful freedom? Who breathed into his tormented heart that appalling power of forgiveness? Who raised his mind to that fearful level, or descended to meet it, stooping to man that man might rise to God?



## CHAPTER XX

*A Power that, being Unknowable, is best known;  
For His transcendent Being can reply  
To every agony, "I am That which waits  
Beyond the last horizon of your pain,  
Beyond your wildest hope, your last despair,  
Above your heaven, and deeper than your hell.  
There is not room on earth for what ye seek.  
Is there not room in Me?"*

THE BOOK OF EARTH





## CHAPTER XX

ONE thing became increasingly clear to me. If these writers had been more fully acquainted with the philosophy of Christendom, they would have discovered that they were not really attacking the truth of the Christian religion. They were unconsciously attacking the world around them and those stern realities to which the religion was the only adequate clue. They were affirming, in their own far lighter way, an ideal, and complaining that the world in which they sojourned fell short of it—

“Ah Love! Could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry scheme of things entire,  
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire.”

In their own far lighter way, they, too, would destroy the Temple, and in three days re-build it of an incorruptible substance. Their enemy was not the religion but their own bad opinion of a universe from which the religion had been removed. The most striking achievement of their predecessor, Voltaire himself, was his revolt against his own conception of a Supreme Being indifferent to the grief of man, and bearing no part of it. The unconscious irony of his poem on the Lisbon earthquake has never been realized; for, in that strangely con-

tradictory work, the very man who did his best to destroy the idea of Christ in God, and raze it from the human brain with the smoking acids of his mockery, suddenly begins to plead like a passionate child for its restoration. In the face of a temporal catastrophe, no worse than a thousand others recorded by history, or written upon the naked rocks of this planet, he pours forth his horror at what is nothing more or less than his own favourite idea of a God bereft of the personal attributes of Christ. He believed in and asserted the existence of a supreme Being. The chapel inscribed "Deo crexit Voltaire" was not a mockery. Voltaire's argument, therefore, leaves him no escape whatever from the implications of his own *Ode sur le Fanatisme*:

*'Ignorer ton être suprême,  
Grand Dieu! C'est un moindre blasphème,  
Et moins digne de ton courroux  
Que de te croire impitoyable,  
De nos malheurs insatiable,  
Jaloux, injuste comme nous.'*

Considerations of this kind gradually confirmed me in a belief which seemed to me, indefinite though it was, as far as I could go for some years. It amounted simply to this. The Christian philosophy, the Christian scheme, had an essential truth which was somehow independent of its earthly history. It was in accord with eternal realities; and, whether we could go further or not, its "facts" had a higher symbolic value and significance than any other in the history of mankind. They had this value, even if they

were taken merely as composing a vast parable, of which we could accept the "heavenly meaning," without necessarily accepting the "earthly story" in all its details. It would not matter—or so it seemed to me at this time—if the whole historical basis of the Christian creed were to be swept away, with all those "facts" which Arnold had so easily dismissed as a "world of illusion," provided that the "idea" remained in its essential truth, eternal in the heavens. It would not matter if it were discovered tomorrow that the historical details of the Crucifixion were as legendary as the angel's narrative in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or as fabulous as the circles of hell in Dante's *Divine Comedy*; for, just as these immortal poems transcend the science and theology of their time through their harmonious accord with a deeper reality, so the whole scheme of the Christian philosophy—though in a far deeper way—was a representation of abiding truth. If there had never been a Calvary on earth, there was an invisible Calvary at the very heart of Creation, and an Eternal Passion in the divine depths of the creative Love.

It was all involved in the mystery of a Reality which transcended Time. Just as the creed declared that the eternal Christ was "timelessly begotten before all worlds," so it might be said that the whole story of the New Testament, from the supernatural birth to the death and supernatural resurrection of the incarnate God, recapitulated, re-enacted, or shadowed forth in Time an eternal transaction, which to most ears could only be told by what Milton called—

“ . . . process of speech,  
So told as earthly notion can receive.”

The philosophy was true on the macrocosmic scale, no matter what value we attached to its microcosmic representation on earth. There was an eternal Christ in God, and in the very act of creation there was an out-pouring of self, an act of self-sacrifice, and self-limitation, which—as I pictured it—stretched out the arms of the Creator upon the cross of His own love; for, if the mortal is ever to be raised to immortality, there is only one Way. It requires a divine self-limitation, a divine companionship, and it leads through the Valley of Death.

It leads through the Valley of Death because the distance is infinite, and can never be traversed by the unaided finite powers of man. Whether it be profitable or not, no man can gain the whole world. There is only one infinite achievement possible to man. He can renounce everything. It is the only thing he can do completely. The cancellation of all finite bonds by Death may be forced upon him; or he may merely acquiesce in it; or he may deliberately choose it, in vindication of what he believes to be higher values, thus proving that he is not altogether of this world. But, in any case, it is in ultimates, as Goethe said, that men see God. The crucial instance of such an ultimate, for man, is the moment when his self-conscious being, with all its world-exploring thoughts, comes to the brink of that dark abyss, either to take the plunge himself, or—more tragically—to watch one whom he loves, in

“The shuddering of that dreadful day,  
When friend and fire and home are lost,  
And even children drawn away. . . .”

If there were a God who had never tasted of death, the supreme dignity would belong to His mortal creatures; for, though He boasted His omnipotence, man could still look Him in His immortal face and die.



## CHAPTER XXI

*Between the effect and cause  
They dare not intervene.  
From the unseen to the seen  
Their roads are Nature's laws;  
But through them, they can breathe  
What none could speak aloud;  
And quietly inter-wreathe  
Through sea-wave and white cloud  
Strange gleams of loveliness  
Whose deep unearthly drift  
Thou couldst not even guess;  
Light that no eyes can see;  
Music no ear hath heard;  
Till they strike home to thee  
Through star and sunset-rift,  
Or the cry of a wandering bird.*

THE LAST VOYAGE





## CHAPTER XXI

DURING the latter half of the nineteenth century the intellectual bewilderment rapidly increased. The greatest writers of the century—Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Dickens—had so strong a grasp of first principles that they were unshaken by the chaotic storms that carried lesser men away. They moved in a serener air, and shewed no trace of the growing tendency to confuse the lines of good and evil. But, especially towards the end of the century, other writers appeared who spent much of their energies in undoing, or attempting to undo the work of their greater predecessors.

The anti-Christian movement in literature was not, primarily, an intellectual movement. It was emotional; and it was largely based on popular misinterpretations of contemporary scientific thought. But the effect on several generations of young readers at the universities can hardly be exaggerated. It induced a mood (a mood, rather than a way of thought) which had little more philosophical significance than an artistic fashion, yet it went far towards establishing a new paganism.

Thomas Hardy, Swinburne, and a hundred others contributed to the result. They had made their more thoughtless readers believe that, if they got rid of the religion that dealt with the realities of suffering, they would somehow be rid of the suffering, too. They were to

be pagan ostriches. The world had grown grey merely at the breath of the Galilean. Literary undergraduates had been led to think that a return to Paganism would make the "roses rosier"; and that, if the compassionate God were abolished, man would somehow escape the laws of the pitiless universe in which, bereft of God, he had no more value than the blindest of atoms. As Swinburne in his *Hymn of Man*—that swan-song of Positivism—had ecstatically chanted:

"By thy name that in hell-fire was written, and burned  
at the point of thy sword,  
Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten. Thy  
death is upon thee, O Lord;  
And the love-song of earth as thou diest, resounds  
through the wind of her wings:  
Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of  
things."

I remember how ecstatically undergraduates echoed the chant, not altogether believing it, but enjoying the sensation, and hoping, perhaps, like Tomlinson in similar circumstances, that "men might call them brave."

Since those days we have heard the "love-song of earth" in many different keys, notably to the diapason of "three hundred mile of cannon" on the Western front, and some twenty million death-rattles in a war between "civilized nations." The world has grown grey at the breath of agnostic statesmen who, believing that Christianity was a religion of slaves, desired to play

the superman. But among the leaders on the other and, in that particular quarrel, the right side, Christianity was little more than a fading dream, a pathetic memory.

"An Iliad," one of them said to me in 1911, in amiable deprecation of certain efforts that had been made for peace, "might be worth a war"; while another of them quoted the *Hymn to Proserpine*:

"Yea, once we had sight of another, but now she is queen, say these.

Not as thine, not as thine was our mother, a blossom  
of flowering seas—

For thine came pale and a maiden, and sister to  
sorrow, but ours

Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of  
flowers."

"*That* is how I should like to write," he said, "if *I* were a poet."

Enthusiastic as I was, at the time, about the technical skill of Swinburne, I had never been carried away by his thought or his emotion, and I remember thinking, with a somewhat sick heart, that the extra syllable of an exotic anapæst would hardly compensate the "heavy-laden" of the old version for all that was being taken away. Apollo and Aphrodite had no message for them. No artist can belittle the senses, or the values of physical beauty. But Swinburne himself must have found an infinitely deeper truth and beauty in an older picture, whether he took it as history or parable, when he re-

described the breaking of the box of alabaster, in the poem which he entitled *Quia Multum Amavit*.

Human suffering, in fact, was not abated by the destruction of the only religion that had ever taken suffering to the heart of its God and found Him waiting to bear it. Cancers did not vanish, hunger was not fed, cruelty did not cease, when that divine remedy began to fail. Disbelief in the remedy and dismissal of the Healer did not abolish the disease, but rather redoubled its pangs by rendering them meaningless; whereas, hitherto, it had been possible to regard them as part of a great price which man was helping God to pay, in a divine companionship.

Later, I understood more fully the profound consolation of this idea, when I heard Catholics speak quite simply of "offering up" their troubles, as though, in bearing them, they were helping the Creator of the world and easing His burden.

But man, set free of that divine bond; man, as "the master of things," in the ironical face of a physical universe that crushes his intellectual powers and must eventually eliminate his planet and his entire race, very soon ceased to impress the youngest agnostic; and as for Swinburne's "glory to man in the highest," the splendour of the words was after all a stolen splendour. The beauty of that *Gloria in Excelsis*, true or false, was not Swinburne's property. As a greater poet suggested, qualifying his praise of an earlier work by Swinburne, it is hardly just to abuse the Deity in language whose beauty is entirely borrowed from the Bible. But the interesting fact is that,

like Voltaire, Huxley and Spencer, in confronting ultimates, Swinburne was unconsciously reasserting one more isolated fragment of the philosophy of Christendom. With a false emphasis, owing to his inability to envisage the whole problem, he was nevertheless repudiating the idea of a loveless God; and, in the utterance of his own *Ecce Homo*, he was committing himself to philosophical corollaries more complicated and profound than he knew. "Man in the highest" is not the cry of a madman. It is acceptable to the human reason; but it is acceptable only on certain conditions, and those conditions are elucidated in the majestic structure of the philosophy of Christendom, and nowhere else. "Man in the highest" is either a foolish boast, or it involves what Crashaw, in his most magnificent lines, called "heaven in earth and God in man." If it does the latter, and we are to co-ordinate this fact with the statements of the scientific agnostics which have been noted earlier, there are still further consequences of an unescapable kind. If the Unknowable Being of Herbert Spencer, Omnipresent, Supernatural, Perfect, Absolute, is to be identified with Huxley's Eternal, who requires justice and mercy; and this again with Voltaire's supreme Being who must be capable of compassion; and this again with Shelley's "Light whose smile kindles the Universe"; and this again is to be co-ordinated with the God in man of a "free-thinking" nineteenth century poet; and this again, across the ages, with Plato's vision of Love, the Mediator between man and God, we are not so very far, after all, from the mystery discerned by the Desert Physician in the lines already quoted:

"The Very God! Think, Abib, dost thou think?  
So the All-great were the all-loving, too!  
So through the thunder comes a human voice."

Indeed nothing is more remarkable than the way in which this "ultimate paradox" reasserts itself, in new terms, in the work of the very men who were trying to deny it. They have no sooner barred one door against it than it enters at another, and in the strangest of masks and disguises. Swinburne, having abolished the Deity, begins a hymn to Victor Hugo; and, suddenly, the words take fire, and we find him unconsciously swinging a censer in his own strange ritual before the altar of the Eternal. For it is surely not a mere fellow-mortal that "all hearts acclaim" as the "*one* soul supreme," the "*one conquering name*." That sublime contrast of the All and the One is simply an unconscious assertion of the poet's monotheism. It is not M. Victor Hugo at whose approach, in the very ecstasy of mysticism, and with his own apocalyptic vision of the ultimate paradox, in which extremes meet and the infinite circle is rounded, the poet cries:

"All crowns before *his* crown  
Triumphantly bow down."

For again and again when the poet of the *Songs before Sunrise* wishes to give perfect expression to the grief of man, he turns to the imagery of the very religion which he has again and again despised and rejected. He does not merely bow in adoration before the Crucifix under which those beautiful lines of Victor Hugo himself were inscribed:

*'Vous qui pleurez, venez à ce Dieu, car il pleure.  
Vous qui souffrez, venez à lui, car il guérit.  
Vous qui tremblez, venez à lui, car il sourit.  
Vous qui passez, venez à lui, car il demeure.'*

It may be said that he might accept this as he would accept an address to a god in the Greek anthology. But he goes further. In his *Songs before Sunrise*, where he is expressly rejecting the creed of the priests and the Church, and expressly voicing the griefs of man, in his own age, he sees all those multitudes of suffering human faces growing into one Face and, despite himself, he seems to be forced into this amazing reaffirmation of the very God in man whom he had himself endeavoured to discard:

“O sacred head, O desecrate,  
    O labour-wounded feet and hands,  
O blood poured forth in pledge to fate  
    Of nameless lives in divers lands,  
O slain and spent and sacrificed  
People, the grey-grown speechless Christ.”

He might reject the historical “facts” of Christianity. He might refuse every local and temporal habitation for the divine idea. But he could not escape the eternal truths that shone through it, the deepest that the spirit of man has ever discerned in its age-long search for God. He might escape Calvary, but he could not escape the Cross at the heart of the universe.

I should not have dwelt here at such length on the work of the latter poet except for a personal reason, and a



curious personal experience. One of my most vivid recollections of my early days in London is an occasion when I dined with Swinburne. He was exceedingly kind to me; and while he talked of Dickens, and his favourite poets, and, later on, of a walk by the sea-coast that had inspired one of his own poems, he had a light on his face that I have only seen on certain rare occasions on any human countenance. It seemed to shine from a distant country, the land of the immortals to which he was going, and it had their own serene confidence.

“From the bountiful infinite west, from the happy  
    memorial places,  
Full of the stately repose, and the lordly delight  
    of the dead,  
Where the Fortunate Islands are lit with the light  
    of ineffable faces,  
And the sound of a sea without wind is about them,  
    and sunset is red.”

And, then, speaking of some Russian atrocity, his face changed; and like a child possessed—in the old direful sense of “possession”—he spat out these remarkable words: “Christianity itself never conceived anything more *ghastly*.”

Many years after Swinburne's death, I found myself living in the vicinity of his old home at Bonchurch, in the Isle of Wight; and I was invited to a festal occasion there of a very different kind. The gates were wide open; and the dark winding road down to the house, between over-

shadowing boulders and trees, had been strewn with ferns and flowers in two regular lines by the hands of nuns; for the poet's old home had become a Convent; and it was the Feast of the Sacred Heart. At the doors of the house, immediately under the room where his boyish head had rested, the procession was forming, with long lines of children in white and the black-robed nuns, behind the four bearers of the canopy. The sea in which the poet had swum so often was breathing gently below, and the sea-wind rustled through the myrtles and tall palm-trees. Then with lights and incense, the priest with the host moved slowly forward under the canopy preceded by the procession, singing, along the path that the poet's feet had trodden while he was composing his anti-Christian songs.—One of these paths was now a Way of the Cross.—The long procession circled through the whole of that beautiful garden overlooking a sea of Mediterranean warmth and colour, under the ancient cedars that he loved, and over a smooth lawn to a little flower-decked altar, before which all knelt for Benediction in the mellowing sunset air.

*O, salutaris hostia.*

And, as the pale faces were raised, "breathless in adoration," I saw once more the light that I had seen on the "anti-Christian" poet's face. It shone over the whole scene; over the walls of the former library (now a chapel of the Sacred Heart) and over the windows in which the initials of a former owner remained as the *I.H.S.* of its

present occupants. It seemed as though by some strange alchemy, the material elements of the place had been transfigured; and the light of the poet's presence was over all, as though he too was at peace and knew that all was well.

*Et antiquum documentum  
Novo cedat ritui.*

Conjunctures of this kind are not miracles, except in the sense of Herbert Spencer's statement that all things, in the last analysis, rest upon what he called "the supernatural"; but I can say, with certainty, that the aspect of things which was revealed to me there had a spiritual significance; and that, just as our normal vision of a human face is more truly significant to us than the scientific view of that face as an organization of electrons, so I seemed for a moment to catch a fuller meaning from the fleeting expression, the divinely beautiful expression, in the aspect of the world which was presented to me by these incidents and coincidences. The overpowering effect of certain great moments in music, the "thrill"—of the significant conjunctures in great drama, all convey the sense of a hidden meaning; the sense of the real presence of a divinity that "shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." There are few men who, if they look back through their lives, and are honest with themselves, have not some apprehension of this directive and shaping influence. They may have been unaware of it when it was most active; but after the event, as they look back on the hopes that have been withheld from them, they can

hardly help realizing like great rugged old Dr. Johnson that those hopes were not idly withheld, and that their destinies were—

“Safe in His hand whose eye discerns from far  
The secret ambush of a specious prayer.”

The strange transmutation of the poet's old house was to me an exact parallel to the unconscious transmutations of his thought in the poems I have quoted above.



## CHAPTER XXII

*Not thine to understand  
How the two worlds accord,—  
The will of Love, our Lord,  
With this dark wheel of Time.  
Yet thou didst hear them chime  
Like one deep sanctus bell . . .*

THE LAST VOYAGE



## CHAPTER XXII

THE modern world has grown used to the fact, and has ceased to wonder, that we number all our years and centuries backwards and forwards into the abyss of Time from the birth of one Child. Not a journal is printed, not a letter posted in New York or Paris, that does not remember that date.

We are so accustomed to the results direct and indirect of the great change brought about by Christianity that we seldom realize all that we owe to it, or picture to ourselves what the world would be like if that new light had never dawned upon the human mind. Among the myriads of merely curious results (upon which I lay no particular stress here) the character of European art and literature would have been wholly different. The pagan world—so far as it was merely pagan—had already exhausted its artistic possibilities. The contemporary world, in its return to paganism, is already, with bitterness and despair, discovering that dead end. What would have become of Dante and Milton it is impossible to surmise; but there would certainly have been no *Divine Comedy* and no *Paradise Lost*. Chaucer would have made no pilgrimage to Canterbury. None of the great medieval epics of chivalry would have been written. Gibbon would have lost the subject for his irony; Voltaire would have been able to cultivate his garden; and the peculiar



charities of Dickens could no more have come into existence than the *Ring and the Book* of Browning. Art would have lacked the spiritual light that haunts the eyes of the Madonna and the Child, a light that is like no other. The glory of Raphael; the beauty of holiness, which seemed almost to create a new sense in humanity as it shone through the celestial air of Fra Angelico, or even as we see it in the more emotional Assumption by Murillo at the Louvre, would never have kindled the mind or touched the heart. We should have lost the deepest musical harmonies of the world. There would have been no Passion music from Bach, and ten thousand choirs of Europe would have been dumb. The very stones of her cities would have been more silent; for they would never have soared into her great cathedrals. Not a child on the face of the planet would ever have been taught the Lord's prayer or heard the magic word "Christmas."

The curious may continue this process of elimination without prospect of an end; and no thoughtful mind can consider the result without a new and startling realization of all that had been brought about by a certain "historical Figure approaching us in Time."

It is true that the course of history might have been altered in astonishing ways if some other single personality had been eliminated; but there is no other personality whose place might not have been taken to some extent, and certainly none whose elimination would have left us with a world so endlessly different in almost everything we can think of. The ramifications of those differences, within a few centuries, would have been

innumerable. There would have been neither a Reformation, nor a Church that required it; and, most pregnant absence of all, there would have been no New Testament. Let anyone consider for a single moment what that one omission would have meant to the world—to the inner life of millions upon millions of simple hearts and minds among our forefathers; to the status of womanhood; and to every ethical advance that any nation has made during the last nineteen hundred years. These are the first haphazard consequences that would occur to anyone considering such an elimination. They are reinforced by a moment's consideration of the positive aspect of the actual consequences of that one historical Figure's advent. One illustration of this aspect is enough for the moment here; for the mind deeply and truly considering it must be aware that it is one of an infinite number; and that this infinitude in effect again suggests an infinite Cause. It is recorded of Napoleon that he once remarked of the Founder of Christianity—"I know men; and I tell you this was more than man." The testimony of Napoleon had no more value than the testimony of any other equally acute and shrewd mind; but it was delivered from a point of view that was peculiar to himself, as the foremost representative of human ambition, and the thirst for fame or earthly "glory." It was the devotion inspired by a Galilean peasant that aroused the wonder of Napoleon; and he did not consider the far stranger fact that this devotion drew men not to a throne but to a cross. The words in which Napoleon expressed himself, during his imprisonment, and in

the view of death, were nobly rendered by Newman in his *Grammar of Assent*, and they haunted my memory as yet one more contribution to the great "consilience of inductions."

"I have been accustomed to put before me the examples of Alexander and Caesar, with the hope of rivalling their exploits, and living in the minds of men for ever. Yet, after all, in what sense does Caesar, in what sense does Alexander live? Who knows or cares anything about them? Their chief home is the schoolroom; they have a foremost place in boys' grammars and exercise books; they are splendid examples for themes; they form writing copies. So low is heroic Alexander fallen, so low is imperial Caesar, *'ut pueris placeat et declamatio fiat.'*

"But, on the contrary, there is just One Name in the whole world that lives; it is the Name of One who passed his years in obscurity, and who died a malefactor's death. Eighteen hundred years have gone since that time, but still it has its hold upon the human mind. It has possessed the world, and it maintains possession. Amid the most varied nations, under the most diversified circumstances, in the most cultivated, in the rudest races and intellects, in all classes of society, the Owner of that great Name reigns. High and low, rich and poor, acknowledge Him. Millions of souls are conversing with Him, are venturing on His word, are looking for His Presence. Palaces, sumptuous, innumerable, are raised to His honour; His

image, as in the hour of His deepest humiliation, is triumphantly displayed in the proud city, in the open country, in the corners of streets, on the tops of mountains. It sanctifies the ancestral hall, the closet, and the bed-chamber; it is the subject for the exercise of the highest genius in the imitative arts. It is worn next the heart in life; it is held before the failing eyes in death. Here, then, is One who is *not* a mere name, who is not a mere fiction, who is a reality. He is dead and gone, but still He lives—lives as a living energetic thought of successive generations, as the awful motive-power of a thousand great events. He has done without effort what others with life-long struggles have not done. Can He be less than Divine? Who is He but the Creator Himself; who is sovereign over His own works, towards whom our eyes and hearts turn instinctively, because He is our Father and our God."

This answer, of course, could not be justified by the facts immediately before us, in a statement which, however moving it might be, covered only a fragment of the whole case. But whether, on that mere fragment, the answer was acceptable or not, we could hardly escape the question. What was the explanation of the really immeasurable difference in actual living personal power between this Man who died a felon's death nineteen centuries ago, and all others? We, too, might say: "Art thou He that should come, or look we for another?" If there were anything at all in the strange flashes of intuition

that illuminate the earlier history of religion (whether we call them flashes of genius or prophecy) it was at least difficult to suppose that we were to look for another in whom they would be more perfectly fulfilled. The Christ might be an illusion. But there would never be more than one Christ in history.

## CHAPTER XXIII

*For, as a child that learns to walk on earth,  
Life learns these little rhythms of earthly law,  
Listens to simple seas that ebb and flow,  
And spells the large bright order of the stars,  
Wherein the moving Reason is revealed  
To man's up-struggling mind, or breathed like song  
Into the quiet heart, as love to love.  
So, step by step, the spirit of man ascends  
Through joy and grief; and is withdrawn by death  
From the sweet dust that might content it here  
Into His kingdom, the one central goal  
Of the universal agony.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH



## CHAPTER XXIII

HERE I should like to consider more closely a phrase used earlier—that the evidence for the Christian religion is shown not so much in the light it receives as in the light it gives. There are aspects of life and death which every thoughtful human being must confront at one time or another, aspects that trouble the mind and the heart, and trouble them all the more deeply in proportion to their own depth and sensitiveness. Certain aspects of the universe, as we have seen, forced a sceptic like Thomas Hardy (*anima naturaliter Christiana* though he might be) to offer up a prayer for the reaffirmation of “nescience”; for, outside the Christian philosophy, those aspects could never be touched with any real meaning, or rendered tolerable by the light of any purpose. In the Christian philosophy, on the other hand, all the answers to those dark riddles were seen to be necessary parts of a consistent whole. Moreover, each part helped to bring out the full meaning of every other part in a way that could hardly be regarded as accidental, and was certainly not the work of human ingenuity, for they illuminated vast regions which were beyond the ken of the Fathers, the Councils, or even the New Testament. It was only very gradually that the intellectual majesty, the overwhelming intellectual splendour of the creed, dawned upon me. Few of the orthodox, perhaps, at the quiet moment in the chant of the Nicene Creed



when the voices are hushed on the words "*et homo factus est*," visualize all that it can mean, and all that it can illuminate in the "grand sequence" of evolutionary events. They worship the Power descending, and they do so rightly. But it is possible, at the same moment, to see with the mind's eye the long slow ascent of the evolutionary process of creation, until a being, "darkly wise and rudely great" emerges, capable of meeting and of union with the Power which is its origin and end; so that the infinite circle from God to God is rounded.

Heard in this way, the great simple phrase—"et homo factus est"—contains all the long process of evolution, as Eternity contains all the sequences of Time. It contains all the wonder of the first birth of the spirit. One seems to be aware of a universe hushed in awe over the first helpless man-child in whom it could be said that the transition from the sub-human was accomplished; a child laid in the wild manger of the brute creation, aeons before the discovery that the inns of this world had no room; aeons before the building of the first inn; while from all the starry heights to which his innocent face was upturned there shone the quiet annunciation and prophecy of the new bond between heaven and earth: *Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given.*

The man-child had emerged from the brute creation; a new and higher order of values had been evolved; but the process did not end there. It pointed beyond itself. The advent of man was a prophecy of the greater event and still higher order towards which he was moving as his final cause and true origin. The full sacramental

significance of the process was not apparent to him until he was met on the upward way by the Power descending, and the central Figure of religious history, in whom the long-prophesied meeting was accomplished, became the child of His own children and called himself the "Son of Man." This title, as Liddon remarked, was itself "the product of a self-consciousness, for which the being human is not a matter of course, but something secondary and super-induced." It hinted, or rather took for granted, a deeper origin. The same hint was unconsciously implicit in the dramatic irony with which the supreme Representative of the genus homo was announced by the Roman pro-consul to a mocking world. The agnostic, Pilate, was quite innocent of any irony in his classification of Jesus Christ; but the "grand sequence of events" had its own significance. There was a wider and deeper consciousness behind it than his own; and when he was caught up in the orderly movement of the universal drama, as a musician is caught up by the surrounding orchestra and forced to play his part, the most poignantly ironic annunciation of all Time was made in the single dark phrase, *Ecce homo!*

All these things, looking before and after, were unfolded for me in that one hushed moment of the creed—*et homo factus est.*

I could look back, for instance, at the nebula from which our universe had emerged, and find a new meaning in the deep lines of Aquinas—

*In cruce latebat Deitas,  
At hic latet simul et humanitas.*

The mystery of the Virgin Birth was in it, and the mystery of the Real Presence, too.

In exactly the same way, I was never able to hear or to read a certain sacramental prayer but that it seemed to illuminate the whole process of the evolution of life, whereby (according even to the agnostics and materialists) the lifeless elements became, first, the vehicle of the higher values of the mind; and, second (whether those gropings towards a still higher order be illusory or not), the vehicle of spiritual values also. All the mystery of the increasing values of the evolutionary process seemed to be elucidated for me there:

“God, who in creating human nature, didst marvellously ennoble it; and hast still more marvellously renewed it; grant that by the mystery of these sacramental elements, we may be made partakers of His Godhead, who vouchsafed to become partaker of our humanity.”

As a mere philosophical formula, it seemed to be the perfect statement of the whole creative, sacramental and incarnational process, one of those perfect statements which we recognize, intuitively, as the nearest approximation to absolute truth of which we are capable. It supplied the missing and complementary factors to the evolutionary theories.

It seemed as though the human race had been developed, as far as was possible, through the lower and less subtle laws of self-interest, and the “survival of the fittest,” and that, at a certain stage, if the development

were to continue, it must establish contact with its Creator and be lifted up to the eternal order. It was like one of those mysterious advances whereby, in the former history of evolution, creatures that had lived in the obscure depths of the sea had emerged into light and air, and developed wings. But, in our own case, we human creatures had long been beating against the barriers of the temporal world. Our minds had long been struggling against the limitations of our mortality. We had considered the heavens. We had plunged into the depths. We had looked through the endless ages, before and after; and now, when we were at a complete loss as to how we could go further, or transcend the old law of our being which gave the race to the swift and the battle to the strong, a new light dawned upon us. It offered us not a finite and ephemeral victory that eventually tasted like dust; but the lonely pangs of a defeat that cast off the temporal for the Eternal. This—the introduction of the infinite and eternal into the blindness of our mortal nature—was the secret of that strange reversal or cancellation of the old law of survival. The new law involved the ultimate Paradox: *He that saves his life shall lose it. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

Nothing that man could gain in his temporal world could be reckoned as very great. His entire planet was but an insignificant speck in the abyss. If he ruled it completely, he would still be the king of an ant-hill. But at the imperative voice of conscience, he could lose everything; he could die; and, since none could do more,

in both of these ultimates he touched infinitude, and laid hold upon the eternal order.

I put it to myself in this way.

(a) Darwin's "grand sequence of events" was no meaningless or purposeless.

(b) The elaborate development of man, especially in those qualities and characteristics which made him—to a certain extent—an inheritor of the realm of eternal values, and, whenever he suffered or died for them, compelled us to recognize in him a far-off kinship to the divine, must be a part of that purpose.

(c) From time immemorial, the human race, in its highest and deepest strivings, intellectual and ethical, has been searching for the purpose and meaning of it all, and groping after some means of approach to God.

(d) It was not unreasonable to suppose that in this striving, we saw the beginnings of one of those great advances in evolution, of which there had been many former instances, whereby a section of the world had been lifted up to a new order of life, almost as a coral-reef emerges from the sea, and becomes an isle of palms. I sometimes pictured a quite impartial Titan of Science examining the denizens of our planet through a huge microscope. He would be struck by the curious habit that had been developed there of building strange edifices with spires pointing to heaven. He would observe multitudes of odd creatures kneeling therein; and the beauty of the buildings and the systematic symbolism discovered within them would perhaps prevent him from jumping to the conclusion that they were merely symp-

toms of a disease from which the beasts of the field were exempt. He might suppose that, as boughs grow towards a real light, there was a real object in it. As a naturalist he would feel it his duty to discover why these things were so.

(e) If there were any meaning and purpose in this process; and if the agnostics were right (as I believed they were) about the helplessness of our human faculties before "the Unknowable," the meaning, the purpose and the help must come from above. These odd creatures, kneeling in their strange edifices, were being led, drawn, persuaded into this effort towards the knowledge of God; and if That which was responsible for their existence and was thus persuading them or leading them, had any care at all for what it had created, or any purpose in such persuasion, it was at least possible that, at a certain stage, it would meet its creation half-way. This conclusion was again in accord with the Christian philosophy. There was nothing against it. There was everything for it.

The philosophical scheme, taken merely as a scheme, therefore involved, as an integral part of its mechanism, an interaction between God (the uncaused Cause) and our own highest faculties. Moreover, if the agnostics were right about the helplessness of those faculties, in their own strength, they could hardly be cut off entirely from That which had evolved them and still sustained them. The initiative was with the Prime Mover, not with ourselves. Even agnosticism could hardly deny to its own uncaused, perfect and omnipresent Cause the

power to fill the heart or the mind that its power had created, or to reveal its own attributes to minds created in its own image.

(f) The assertion that man could die at the imperative voice of conscience; and that, since none could do more, he thus touched infinitude, and laid hold upon the eternal order, led directly to a deeper question. The death of Socrates, uncertain of the end to which he was going, had just one touch of sublimity that might seem to be necessarily lacking in the death of a Divine Being, assured of His own resurrection and ultimate victory. The sublimity of the last words of Socrates has a special appeal to the true agnostic of to-day.

¶ "The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly, and the slower runner has overtaken me, and my accusers are keen and quick, and the faster runner, who is unrighteousness, has overtaken them. And now I depart hence condemned by you to suffer the penalty of death—they too go their ways condemned by the truth to suffer the penalty of evil and wrong. I must abide by my award—let them abide by theirs. I suppose that these things may be regarded as fated—and I think that they are well. . . . The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows."

Agnosticism here seems nobler than knowledge. It touches an ultimate beyond all known horizons. It is not

only faith without sight. It is almost faith without hope; and, in this, there is a sublimity which seems to transcend anything that could be experienced by a merely divine Being. What could an almighty God know of that forlorn adventure? What could the absolute Ruler of an ideal and eternal realm know of the infinite majesty of the dead man lying across his broken sword; the bitterness of final defeat; the dumb farewells of the beloved and dying; the blind tears in the night; the look of the brown earth by the open grave. We are accustomed to speak lightly, even in the artistic field, of those who have never suffered, or show no sign of it in their work. It is precisely in these pangs that we seem to approach our Maker; and that, here and there, in the history of the race, one man or another has been caught up to the very heart of God. But if God Himself were incapable of that ultimate of ultimates—the forlorn hope, man in his bitterness might well feel more divine than God in His greatness, and the heavens would seem emptier than the least of mortal hearts that ever carried its load of grief for another.

There was only one philosophy that offered a solution to this riddle, which, as St. Augustine discovered among the Platonists, was almost overlooked by every other, even the most spiritual. It was flooded with light by the Christian philosophy, not in a mere concession to human emotions, but in the rational elucidation of an intellectual problem involving a whole hierarchy of values. Platonist and Christian had contributed to the doctrine of the Logos. It had been elaborated by Hegel to elucidate all the relations of Subject and Object, and their final con-



summation in the Triune God, where Subject and Object were One, and the Thing in itself was no longer Unknowable because the Knower was also the Known. This might give us the cold philosophical diagram of that relationship within the Godhead without which God Himself would be lonelier and less than the least of human lovers. There is a sense in which the "infinitude" of God implies conditions as well as relationships. It is the infinitude, not of "boundlessness," but of perfection; and perfection has its laws. It might involve the power of putting itself in another's place, even though that other were finite. But it was not until I found theologians trying to explain away a certain quotation in the New Testament that I fully realized the applicability here of the statement with which this chapter opened. *The evidence for the Christian religion is shown not so much in the light it receives as in the light it gives.* The mystery still transcended all human speech, but I knew that the answer as well as the question was hidden in one dark sentence of the New Testament. I could never think again of the Supreme Being as inhibited from that loneliest of all adventures, the forlorn hope in which man has again and again proved his own kinship to the Divine. No hope was ever so forlorn as that which rang through the agnostic night, when the clouds went over the face of the God-abandoned Image of God on Calvary, crying *Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabacthani?*

## CHAPTER XXIV

*Did His creation, then, involve descent,  
Renunciation, sacrifice in heaven,  
A Calvary, at the inmost heart of things,  
Wherein the Eternal Passion still enacts  
In an eternal world what mortal eyes  
Saw dimly on one shadowy hill of Time?*

THE LAST VOYAGE



## CHAPTER XXIV

It was not my intention to dwell upon private and personal matters; but, unless they are touched upon here, it is impossible to give a true account of my own approach to what I now finally believe.

I had been living and thinking for some years in the lives and thoughts of the great discoverers of science, and I had just completed the second volume of a work in their praise—a long poem entitled *The Torch Bearers*.

One of the chief heroes of this volume—*The Book of Earth*—was Darwin. The choice of a character who had confessed that his own specialized work had entirely destroyed his appreciation of the master-works of human genius, might be a severe test of the theory that poetry is inherent in all high endeavour. But I felt that the truth and simplicity of that great character, pondering over his masses of detail till, one by one, his facts fell into shape, might bring a new kind of poetry to light; the poetry, not so much of science as of the scientific character and its devotion to truth; a poetry that might grow out of science, as flowers and ferns grow out of the crevices of a cliff.

“And strangely there  
New beauty, like the smile on truth’s hard face  
Gleamed on them. Never did bracken and hart’s  
tongue fern

Whisper a tale like those whose dauntless roots  
Were creviced in that grim rock."

\* \* \* \*

And all this while, as I look back, I seem to have been walking in my sleep through worlds unrealized. The event that woke me and forced me, brutally, to discover what I really believed, was a death, an unexpected and sudden death, which ended twenty years of inseparable comradeship.

I was driven, as never before, to ask myself what I could really hold as true. The scientific investigator of comparative religion is continually asking himself whether the resemblance he detects between certain legends indicates "so strong a tendency of the human mind to imagine a certain class of incidents as to invalidate the historical evidence for the actual occurrence of such incidents in any case."

But I was not in the mood for self-deception. Literature, Art, Music, meant nothing to me at that time. I wanted not intellectual abstractions, but facts in accord with eternal truth, and I turned in absolute repugnance from every form of superstition. I wanted not the bread that perishes, but the Bread of Life; and in all places but one, I was offered a stone. There was only one place in which I seemed to feel that Presence, which the Puritan poet of New England had felt, while he was translating Dante:

"So, as I enter here from day to day  
And lay my burden at this minster gate,

Kneeling in prayer, and not ashamed to pray,  
The tumult of the time disconsolate  
To inarticulate murmurs dies away  
While the eternal ages watch and wait."

I was there surrounded by remembrances of the historical facts, or alleged facts, upon which the philosophy of Christendom was based, and above all of that culminating Figure in the evolution of religion, upon whom—in the last analysis—the whole ideal structure rested. There was a sense, indeed, in which He actually *was* the religion. For Christianity announces not abstractions, but a Person, who was not only the goal, but the way to the goal. In Him, for the Christian, everything seemed to be reconciled. The ideal became realistic; the incarnational scheme of the universe was consummated; and the ultimate paradox of Being, in which earth is lifted to heaven, and heaven stoops to earth, was made intelligible through the love of God. This was the theory. It seemed to me that much of it had been confirmed by a great "consilience of inductions" from a thousand points of view; but it was an incarnational scheme, and could not be disembodied, could not be detached from its own concrete historical facts. What, then, was I to think of those alleged facts? I had to recognize, first of all, that crude interpretations were all too common, and that these crudities were responsible for much of the alienation of the modern mind. But we ought not to repudiate the fact that the earth is round, merely because elementary intelligences interpret it as meaning that the inhabitants

of the Antipodes are hanging upside down. We ought not to repudiate the fact that colours are subjective impressions of our own merely because elementary intelligences interpret it as meaning that they have no objective cause. We ought not to repudiate the fact that matter is an electrical phenomenon, or that it can be resolved into "centres of force," merely because elementary intelligences interpret this as meaning that there is no objective presence, and no Originator or Wielder of the force, whether we call it the *Ding-an-sich* or take the full leap to the ultimate and call it God.

Crude interpretations of the facts might be set aside. The religious thinkers of our time; and, indeed, the master-minds of religion in all times, were no less clear about such matters than their scientific contemporaries. In some cases they were far clearer, because they were more truly philosophical. They were more complete humanists; and, as Ernesti said of Lessing, "If a man thoroughly understands *humaniora* he can treat with knowledge every subject in the world." But could any history be in so complete an accordance with the scheme of spiritual reality as Hegel, for instance, admitted the Christian history to be, if the very "facts" which composed the history and were the earthly expression of the spiritual truth, were an imposture or a mistake? The grounds on which Hegel had made Christianity the culmination of the history of religion, were in themselves an additional illustration of its inner meaning. Oriental religion had brooded upon the infinite. Greek religion had emphasized the finite and sensuous, and was represented by

Art. Christianity included both in a higher unity—the Incarnation of the infinite God.

Hegel's account of the alienation of the world from God, and the method of atonement or reconciliation, can hardly be dissociated even from the poem of *Genesis*, though the "facts" are stated in a way that perhaps makes them more reasonable and acceptable to the modern mind.

Finite knowledge, he says, being a disruption of the unity of mere Nature, is itself "the Fall," which is "no casual conception, but the eternal history of Spirit." For the state of innocence, the paradisaical condition of the animal world is lost thereby. Only the spirit of man, among finite creatures, has a self-cognizant existence. This self-consciousness is at the same time a separation from the Universal and Divine Spirit. "The Fall is, therefore, the eternal Mythos of Man—in fact, the very transition by which he becomes man."

—We have thus, from an unexpected angle, a curious corroboration of the Christian account of the spiritual nostalgia of the human race, and the origin of that nostalgia in something that happened to the first creature who could be called man. It throws a startling illumination also on the abysmal profundity of that apparently simple phrase which connected the "Fall," not only with sin, but with progress: "*Ye shall be as gods.*"

We are separated from God as a child is separated from its mother in order that our finite individuality may be developed; but insistence on our abstract freedom may become alienation, and this is evil. We are free to go



astray, and sooner or later we do go astray because we are not only free, but finite. "The feeling of pain" at such a condition, and the longing to transcend it, we find in David, when he says: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me."

And this, according to Hegel, leads to the Reconciliation or Atonement. "By that unrest of infinite sorrow," he says, "the alienated soul is restored to unity with God." It is difficult to find any real difference between this statement and the cry of St. Augustine: "Our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

But Hegel goes further, in his philosophical accordance with the "facts" of the Christian religion.

"The salvation of the world," he says, "had its birth as a particular Person, but in such a way that finiteness is only the form of His appearance, while infinity and absolutely independent existence constitute the Essence and substantial Being which it embodies."

But this is exactly what the great intellectual council at Nicaea had affirmed all those centuries ago.

Could any history be in so complete an accordance with the scheme of spiritual reality if the very "facts" which composed the history and were the earthly expression of that truth were merely superstitious accretions? A legend, a poem, a picture, may all symbolize eternal truths without committing us to any of the "facts." But here was a case in which a unique historical Figure made a divine claim, in terms which were worthy of the divine; a claim which answered perfectly to a complex philosophical demand, and fitted perfectly into the most

critical and commanding of all philosophical schemes; a claim which had been preceded by a thousand prophetic intimations of the kind which we associate with the highest intuitions and premonitions of genius; a claim for which the whole world had been waiting, hungering and thirsting; and, if the claim were untrue, if it were an imposture or a mistake, the whole spiritual scheme associated with and developed from that claim at once crumbled into dust.

It was an easy way of evading difficulties to detach the religion from the "facts" and view it as a kind of disembodied plan or intellectual pattern of the eternal truths of the unseen spiritual world. But there was one great difficulty about this evasion, which seemed to have been overlooked.

The scheme itself involved, as an integral part of its mechanism, an interaction between the uncaused Cause and the world of our mortality. It involved definite relations to our struggling human world and its "facts," of the very kind which our intellectual pride had been rejecting and despising, exactly as we had been warned beforehand we should reject and despise them. It was almost as though, along one line of thought, we had arrived with Voltaire at the conclusion that the Supreme Power must be acquainted with compassion and justice; that these were the very attributes in which we most unquestionably approached and most clearly recognized the nature of God; and yet we had refused to believe that there could be any real consequences of this conclusion, anywhere in history. The exquisitely interdependent

scheme definitely involved the Eternal Being in our mortal griefs and pains. We could bear our part because it was borne there also. The philosophical solution of the darkest riddle of the universe depended upon just that Eternal Act. It involved an actual sacrifice, of which, as Hegel said, the infinity counterbalanced the loss and turned it into consummate gain. We could not accept it "in principle," and pretend that its enactment was a mere formality; for, without it, God Himself would be less than the meanest of His creatures who could really suffer or die for the right. There is a real sense in which it may be said that

"The iron of His world-ruling law was driven  
By the strong doom of His world-ruling will  
Through His own Body upon the eternal cross  
Of His creative sacrifice in heaven;  
And dark as death on His death-conquering brow  
The whole world's thorns were woven to make His  
crown."

But if, as Hegel asserted for his own philosophical purposes, the Christian philosophy was true as an intellectual scheme of the universe; and if, as he also asserted, that scheme was actually manifested in the facts of history, and had culminated in the birth of Christ, which he described as "a unique event," and carefully distinguished from all other manifestations of the divine; then it seemed utterly contradictory to attempt to detach the scheme from those historical facts in which it was embodied and admittedly had originated. The pantheistic

Christology, of which Strauss was one of the leading exponents, claimed Hegel as its prophet; but it could only do this by ignoring the fact that Hegel had admitted as much about a certain unique historical event as the agnostics had admitted about their Unknowable. The pantheistic Christology which tried to base itself on Hegel, ended in a "lo, everywhere" which was indistinguishable from a "lo, nowhere." It began by identifying the Christ with humanity in general; and it ended—like other forms of pantheism—in abolishing all grades of value, and the distinction between good and evil, together with all those other distinctions which seemed to be part of the organized scheme of things. "God was in Christ in no greater degree than He is in me," a tenth-rate man of letters once remarked with the utmost arrogance; but his hearers did not fall down and worship. It can at least be said that we have learned more about the nature of the Divine, and that we have acquired deeper and truer ideas of the divine character from the unique Figure in whom (as Hegel admitted) the whole history of religion culminated, than from any other source whatsoever. Just as the expression in the countenance of Nature was lost when we focused our mental vision upon the electrons of which all material bodies are said to be composed, so a truth that concerned us even more closely was losing all sharpness and definition, through another maladjustment of the intellectual focus. The idea of the divine character, and the lines of the divine scheme were blurred into a vague mist in the boundless field of universal history. Their values depended—as Hegel had demon-

strated—not upon an “unlimited number of outward and particular manifestations,” not upon a shifting and ever-changing multitude, but on a single definite enduring Personality, the manifestation on earth of a Spirit who “must be recognized as a single positive Being.” The abstract perfection of the divine Nature was focused into definite intelligible form for man in “exclusively one Individual,” described by Von Hügel as “a historical Figure, approaching us in Time.”

It seemed to me that just as the “materialist,” Haeckel, had unconsciously confirmed many great clauses in the philosophy of Christendom, and had drifted into ambiguity and confusion at the very points where he had fallen short of it, or failed to grasp its subtle distinctions, so the idealist, Hegel, also confirmed clause after clause of the Christian creed, and drifted into confusion upon confusion, wherever his intellectual pride made him try to rise above it. Kant had made a similar attempt to detach the Christ from the Christian history and the historical Jesus. He was ready to admit that the statements of the orthodox creed are true, as applied to a transcendental Christ, who was his “Ideal of Moral Perfection.” Jacobi made the same distinction, and declared that worship of the historical Figure in whom the Ideal had been manifested was idolatry, unless the Ideal itself, beneath the manifestation, were recognized as the real object of the worship. Schelling drew near to the profoundest of all partial truths, even in his apparent departure from orthodoxy, when he declared that God, being external to Time, did not become incarnate at a

particular moment of Time, and that "the Incarnation of God is an eternal fact." He seems here to be unconsciously groping after the phrase of Nicaea, "begotten of the Father before all ages"; and to be omitting the distinction between *natum ante omnia saecula* and *incarnatus est*.

We are left, at any rate, with an "incarnation," and an incarnation of "God"; and Jacobi agreed with Hegel that this God is a single, positive spiritual Being. I could attach no intelligible meaning here to the word "incarnation" which did not involve something on the hither side of the purely ideal and eternal realm; something that could hardly be described as rising superior to the purely spiritual, and indeed was best expressed in the apparently naïve, but profoundly philosophical phrase, *descendit de coelis*. Moreover, unless we were to be swallowed up once more in the crudest pantheism, this descent from the transcendental realm, this eternal "incarnation," this embodiment of the Spirit, forced us (exactly as it forced the great councils of Christendom) to make distinctions. The Spirit was not indifferently incarnate in Isaiah and the Emperor Nero; and it is just here, when Hegel and Jacobi approach the very Person who had suggested the incarnational theory to them that their confusion becomes manifest. The character of that Person depended entirely upon the truth of the stupendous claim He made about Himself. Either it was true, or it was utterly preposterous. Jacobi contradicts himself, and entangles himself in a thousand difficulties by saying that the man Christ Jesus is the "highest point or effort of the eternal incarnation." What

possible right had he to say this? If the Incarnation be an eternal fact, achieved once and for all, in a timeless region, above and beyond the finite process of the suns, what have we poor agnostics to do with its "highest points or efforts," or any special occasions in this phenomenal world of Time? We could not even make the reply of Browning:

"God may have other words for other worlds;  
But for this world of ours His word is Christ."

For, if the man Christ Jesus were no more than man, and we could not even rely upon the records of his life, or the things that he said, but must carefully detach our "emotions" from every alleged "fact" connected with him, it seemed quite arbitrary to assert that he was the "highest point or effort" of the eternal incarnation of God. What did we poor agnostics know of the "highest efforts" of God elsewhere on this planet, among the silent multitudes who daily die and leave no record. No record is perhaps better than an unreliable record. Must even great philosophers then estimate the "highest efforts" of Almighty God by the "publicity values" of the stir they had made in our poor little human world; or was there in actual and verifiable fact something absolute about the life and words of "the man Christ Jesus?"

## CHAPTER XXV

*Then, as it seemed, the innermost Silence breathed  
More instantly than music through my soul,  
The very voice of heaven . . .  
And I beheld Him, not as eyes behold  
But as Love sees the light upon a face  
Whereto the world is blind.*

THE LAST VOYAGE





## CHAPTER XXV

THE historical Figure had disappeared. The foot-prints on the shore of Galilee had vanished. The miracles, if any had been wrought, could no longer be investigated. But something yet remained. There were certain recorded utterances which could be examined here and now. If the supreme claim of the Christian philosophy as to the nature of its Founder were true there should be something more than remarkable in the nature of those utterances; something that would reveal itself to the cold and impartial tests whereby we estimate the values of isolated passages in great literature; something in the very quality of those utterances (apart from all other considerations) that came up to the level of the supreme claim. The mental process whereby we appreciate the values of great literature is entirely different from that of either the textual critic or the religious devotee; and it seemed to me that when those alleged utterances of the Founder of the Christian religion were approached along this merely literary path, one tremendous and startling result at once emerged. The facts, of course, had not been overlooked. The utterances themselves had been examined and analyzed in the most elaborate and profound way by philosophers and theologians. They had been taken to pieces and put together again by textual

critics. They had been contemplated by the saints, and wept over by the sorrowful for nearly twenty centuries. But they had either been regarded as too sacred for what might be called mere literary appreciation, or they had become so familiar to us that we no longer felt their full significance. Men of letters had abandoned them to the analytical sceptic, who (as we observed earlier) loses even the expression of the human countenance if he dissolves it into a mist of electrons.

The mental process by which we recognize and appreciate the comparative values of isolated passages in great literature, or discover the author in his work, is not an analytical one. It differs from those of the textual critic and the theologian. But it is rational. There is a profound philosophy behind it; and its principles belong to the great history of aesthetics from Plato to Hegel. Whatever failings it may have in its adventures among contemporaries, it knows nothing of partisanship or prejudice among the masterpieces of the remote past. Its function there is a spiritual one, the recognition of spirit by spirit, through material forms, or the harmonies of language. It is in their qualities that it knows them, and it asks for no other corroboration. In the novel called *Buried Alive* a famous painter, who had been supposed to be dead, finds that he cannot convince a jury of his identity by the artistic evidence of a picture that he had recently painted, and signed as his own in every stroke of his brush. In his indignation, he refuses to show them what they would regard as more satisfactory proof—a strawberry mark under his collar. The story is a parable.

Doubts and controversies may arise over inferior examples, where the artistic values are themselves obscured. But only those who do not know the exquisite precisions and certainties of the highest level of art would distrust their evidence in the noblest cases; and in actual fact it is by their evidence alone that the highest achievements of creative genius in art and literature hold their immortal place in the history of mankind. Höffding, dealing with the symbolic element in religious ideas, had taught that the religious consciousness approximates to the æsthetic point of view, and adopted the mental process of the latter as an essential part of his philosophy of religion. Kant, Hegel, Schiller, Wordsworth and many others, by many independent considerations, had already justified him. It was the mental process with which I was most familiar; and I was haunted by the feeling that it had something of the first importance to tell me about the utterances of the central Figure in the history of religion; and especially, to begin with, that quiet personal reassurance addressed to a mourner at a graveside: *I am the Resurrection and the Life*.

Through all the veils of translation, in Greek, Latin, or English, it seemed to convey values unlike any other that had fallen from human lips. If we compared the loftiest utterances of Socrates or Shakespeare with that sublimely simple statement of its Author's *personal* mastery over the entire kingdom of death, the distance between them was at once seen to be an infinite distance. This infinite distance required an adequate explanation from the literary critic no less than from the theologian. A

difference beyond measure seemed, at first sight, to postulate a Cause beyond measure.

It is recorded of a great statesman that, on the eve of a disastrous war, he profoundly moved his audience by a figurative allusion to the Angel of Death. But how many cubits must have been added to his stature before we could imagine him, or any statesman on earth, making that other personal claim, and carrying conviction as he made it! Would it be a finite or an infinite number?

Shakespeare, the accepted master of merely human speech, might by a considerable expenditure of rhetoric impress us with his power to write a poem that would "live."

"So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee."

But his words are gnats dancing in the sun compared with the stupendous implications of that quiet reassurance, addressed to a woman mourning for the dead, and not only to her, but to all those who have ever looked down speechlessly into a grave—*I am the Resurrection and the Life*.

I am not here discussing the truth of that quiet reassurance, all the more heart-shaking for its profound and infinite calm, nor am I resuscitating the familiar and powerful, but not wholly convincing argument, "either a madman or God." I am looking at the problem for the moment from the point of view of pure literature, and the values whereby we estimate its greatness, those strange values of the eternal world which, in certain inspired moments, seem to emerge from the almost miraculously

perfect arrangement of a few colours on a canvas, a few recorded words from the lips of Socrates, a few lines on a printed page, or a combination of three sounds in music, from which there emerges "not a fourth sound, but a star."

"The Divine," said Hegel, "is the centre of all the representations of art." In the highest moments of art and literature, our temporal world has always been seen *sub specie æternitatis*. At such moments the masters of human expression have felt within themselves a spark of the divine flame, and acquired as Hartmann said, in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, the will and power to think and feel as if God were in them. At such times they seem to reveal fragments of the secret plan of the universe. They overhear phrases of the universal harmony and record them for men. But, however far these human masters may have risen above themselves in that process or have felt themselves inspired by a power greater than their own, there is not a measurable, but an utterly immeasurable distance between their utterance, and those quiet, superhuman, *personal* reassurances: *Let not your heart be troubled. Neither let it be afraid. Ye believe in God. Believe also in Me. . . .*

*Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and ye shall find rest to your souls.*

There is egotism enough in literature, God knows; but what merely human being has been able to round the whole infinite circle from the supreme proclamation of Self as God's equal to the utter humility of a Self prepared to wash the dust of the wayside from the feet of one who would sell him for thirty pieces of silver.

*Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.*

*Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart.*

Were there ever such evidences of lowliness offered to God or man before? Could such evidences be offered—had the words any meaning at all if they came from a merely human being? How was it possible for any finite mind to ascend and descend thus in a single breath between earth and heaven—to claim the full majesty of the Eternal at one moment, and brood like a dove in the heart of a child at the next?

Whether the awful claim be true or not, the words have a character of their own, which sets them apart from all other human words, and requires an adequate explanation. Glib suggestions that the man Christ Jesus never uttered them are not enough. For my present argument, it matters not who formed the sentences attributed to Him. As Rousseau said in his *Émile*: “*Jamais des auteurs Juifs n’eussent trouvé ce ton ni cette morale; et l’Évangile a des caractères de vérité si grands, si frappants, si parfaitement inimitables, que l’inventeur en serait plus étonnant que le héros.*”

Four such inventors, all simple, all on the spiritual heights, and all liars, would be more astonishing still. For those who desired to accept the “idea” in detachment from concrete earthly “facts” and historical events (most of them “illusory”), the life of the “Galilean peasant,” who had so profoundly affected the world as to rearrange its whole scheme of thought, and the very stones of its architecture, had the symbolical truth of a great poem,

in which the most illusory "facts" were themselves curiously perfect parables, or symbolical embodiments of eternal truths.

The very "facts" at which Matthew Arnold's phrase would seem to have been aimed; the very "facts" which Renan smiled away with the tact of a Parisian lady's maid among Breton peasants; the very "facts" that so many moderns have despised and rejected are precisely those which again and again convey the greatest measure of the philosophical truth. If we cannot believe that five loaves could feed a multitude, we are yet forced to observe that the story is an exquisitely accurate parable of the strange process whereby the mind, heart and spirit of the civilized world have been sustained for nearly two thousand years by the bread of life in one man's word. The very tale is sacramental. The "facts" themselves are the five loaves, and after they are consumed there remain endless fragments of super-substantial Bread. Wherever we touch them they have this virtue. Whether it be the account of an episode, or the record of a word spoken, their "historicity" hardly seemed to matter. They had the authenticity and authority of a spiritual law, transcending Nature perhaps, and overruling natural laws, but not contradicting them. Here and now, our water was changed to wine. Here and now the blind were made to see. The "facts," as they were recorded, glowed with an inner light, illuminating the heights and depths of the intellectual and spiritual world. They answered a thousand philosophical riddles, not as the philosopher answers, in empty abstractions, but as the



masterpieces of art answer, in their sacramental use of things we daily see and touch and handle.

But—and this was their most remarkable characteristic—these “facts,” these illusory events, which had so profoundly affected the world, and (whether we availed ourselves of the opportunity or not) had opened up a new order of life, on a higher level, for the entire race, these “facts” were not set before us in a masterpiece of art. They were set before us by very simple narrators—whose very earnestness made them fragmentary; yet, when the masters of art have endeavoured to elaborate or glorify or round off those fragments, the simplest words of those humble fishermen have always dwarfed their proudest efforts. Two words of St. John make all the harmonies of Dante and Milton sound like a tinkling cymbal, and one glimpse of the seamless purple at the foot of the Cross brings all the magnificence of Tintoretto down into the dust.

The “facts” were not recorded in masterpieces of art. The symbolism is not planned. It is the natural and inevitable symbolism of facts that accord with and reveal a profound Reality. They were delivered separately by men who were earnestly striving to make a true record of events which they thought of immeasurable importance to their own souls and to the whole world. Whether their attempts be regarded as a failure or not, there is no parallel in the history of the world for so earnest an attempt on the part of four men to make their testimony as to the facts of any event whatsoever. Elaborate histories have been written by scholars. Beautiful legends

have been rounded into shape by poets; but of any similar attempt to bear witness, merely for the sake of bearing witness, to a series of alleged facts, for which the testifiers and millions of their followers were ready to offer up their lives, there has been no shadow of a semblance. If those broken narratives, then, had that profound, symbolical, sacramental inner truth, to which the philosophy of Europe has paid its tribute through its deepest minds, there is something more to be accounted for than criticism has yet envisaged. An artless report of the alleged facts can hardly strike deeper than the masterpieces of spiritual and intellectual art, unless there be something more in the "facts" themselves than sceptics are usually prepared to admit.

It seemed possible that they shone with all those strange lights and reflections of the Divine because they themselves actually encompassed and enclosed a Light that our darkness could not comprehend.

The biographical "facts," however, might all be minimized or explained away. The alleged physical miracles all happened long ago and, in every case, even though Hegel decreed the historical Figure to be "unique," they were on *a priori* grounds ruled out by the modern mind.

But this other miracle of the spirit, this Pentecostal flame, shining through all the veils of language and translation, in the four-fold record of the things He said, was there for all to see. The words themselves were a gleam of the divine self-revelation. Even as He speaks the words, He prophesies their power; and the quality of the prophecy can be investigated, here and now, as when He

uttered it. *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.*

The values of that utterance—subjected to the coldest standards of literary criticism—are not human. The voice of the Eternal is in it, before whom even the suns and universes dissolve like a shadow, and all the ages of Time are but a moment.

Compare it with any other human utterance, and the immeasurable distance at once appears again, the infinite difference which requires an infinite explanation. Consider, for instance, the words in which that great statesman, Lincoln, expressed the determination of the New World that “government of the people, for the people and by the people shall not perish from the earth.” They embody an ideal, and a noble ideal; and yet, compared with those other words, they sound like a tinkling cymbal. They are of the earth, earthy. The political forum echoes in them. It is at least imaginable that some one may have applauded.

The words of Christ are of another order. They are not to be measured by the duration of “the earth.” They are of the eternal world, and move us with that strangest apprehension of the human spirit, the sense of *das Heilige*.

And yet—here is the most striking distinction between them. The statesman’s utterance appears to be entirely unegotistical. It is concerned with earthly interests, it is true; but they are the interests of “the people.” The other utterance appears to be so completely the annunciation of a Self that it dismisses the whole of the rest of the universe as nothing in comparison. In all the utterances

of the Christ, even in his reassurance of the mourner at the grave-side, there is this personal annunciation—*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*

If any other human lips could ever have made a measurable fraction of such a claim it would have sounded like an insane boast. It is only because the claim is not fractional, but complete, that it has never occurred to any one to regard it as a "boast" or as incompatible with a divine humility. The utterance is its own evidence, as no other ever has been; for its kingdom, its infinitude, is within it. Any madman might say things equally impossible from the human point of view; but he could not simultaneously overwhelm us with that strange sense of the infinitely holy, or move the depths of innumerable hearts to adoration for two thousand years by the sheer majesty—and awful humility—of his words. We might almost say that the supreme claim of the words would be utterly intolerable if they were not true. But the words have been cherished in the hearts of countless millions, to whom they conveyed the values of God.

If the words were true, they carried their own explanation. Hegel had rightly asserted that "the real attestation of the divinity of Christ is not miracles, but the witness of one's own spirit; for only Spirit recognizes Spirit." We may profoundly distrust any conclusions reached merely by subjective "judgments of value," as in the Ritschlian philosophy. But, when the subjective judgments interlock with facts in a perfectly explanatory way, we may at least allow them as much life as the man of science allows to his first intuitive glimpse of a new law.

It would be wrong in a general argument to lay too great a stress on what may be called the literary estimate. My own excuse must be that this is a personal record and that my whole life had been spent in the field of literature. I could never get away from this intuitive certainty, confirmed later by reason, that certain words in the New Testament were infinitely above all others, even of the consummate masters, in the very values with which the greatest art and the greatest literature were most concerned.

The utterances were not in themselves examples of art or literature; but, at the very least, they were enshrined in what might be called "human documents" of a kind that allowed this method of approach. If, as Hegel said, "the Divine is the centre of all the representations of Art," it seemed that the infinite superiority of Christ's recorded utterances to all such representations was due to the fact that His utterances proceeded, not from the artistic circumference, but actually from that divine centre.

This was exactly what had been affirmed by the master-minds of Christendom for nearly twenty centuries, after the most elaborate and profound consideration of all the available facts, by the greatest intellectual and religious councils that the world had ever known.

They thought they had an adequate explanation of that constant, profound and solemn mood of the central Figure of religious history, who quietly took His personal identity with the supreme Being for granted, and sometimes directly affirmed it, or with the utmost subtlety implied it, in words that bow the head and break the

heart with their beauty. Our immediate conscience almost allowed us to say that, if the affirmation were untrue, it could not have been made in those words. There would have been a false note somewhere, a fault of character, a flaw in the tone; and there is none, even in the broken and stumbling human record. We may be more than sure, therefore, of the original glory of the Aramaic. It is a commonplace of criticism that translation dulls the finer lights and shades of all the masters of literature. Here and there, it is sometimes affirmed that by some rare chance a translator of genius has improved on an inferior original. But in this case there has been no question as to where the original greatness lay, and it shines through four records. It shines, moreover, not only through the Greek, the Latin, and the English, but through every language into which it has been translated, transfiguring even those that are in decadence, with something of its own sacramental splendour. The Greek may not be the Greek of the masters, but where is the Greek master who could have said of himself:

Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή

Taking all these instances together, even this poor literary test gives us a glimpse of the Personality that, across the ages and through all the obstacles of the material world and the dull vesture of our mortality, speaks instantly to what is real in our own personalities, and merely by saying what He says, proves that He has the sole right in the universe to say it. Only in music, at its greatest, can we get a distant glimmer of all that is

involved in this statement. But the verses of St. Thomas Aquinas have their bearing upon it:

*Visus, tactus, gustus, in te fallitur,  
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur;  
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius.*

If this last argument be circular, it is because it involves the entire circle of the universe, and the ultimate paradox of Being. There was only one consistent explanation of those affirmations or implications of a personal identity with the Supreme. The explanation was simply that they were true. Even more inexplicable on any other ground was the fact that these utterances actually revealed with infinite perfection the very characteristics which the profoundest of modern idealistic philosophies has told us were to be expected, theoretically, at a certain historical point, in the advance of the human race, and in the progressive revelation of God to man.

“The recognition of the identity of the Subject and God was introduced into the world,” says Hegel, “when the fullness of Time was come. . . . God is thus recognized as Spirit, only when known as the Triune. This new principle is the axis on which the history of the World turns. This is the goal and the starting point of History. When the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son, is the statement of the Bible. Spirit, the one immutable Infinite separates itself from itself and makes this second aspect its polar opposite. Comprehended in pure ideality, that antithetic form of

Spirit is the Son of God. Reduced to particular conceptions it is World-Nature and Finite Spirit. Man himself is therefore comprehended in the idea of God. This implicit unity exists in the first place only for the speculative consciousness; but it must also exist for the sensuous representative consciousness. It must *appear* in the sensuous form appropriate to Spirit, which is the human. *Christ has appeared.* A Man who is God—God who is Man; and thereby peace and reconciliation with God have accrued to the world.”

This philosophy was entirely built up from what appeared to be the intellectual necessities of the relations between subject and object—the mind, the phenomenal world, and That which includes them in a higher unity. It found a hint of the ultimate unity of subject and object in the self-conscious being of man, and it led to the conception of the Eternal Spirit as “Triune,” thus agreeing, once more, with the philosophy of Christendom. The dialectic of Hegel seems to dissolve, at times, into a mist of abstractions; but the quotation given above simply repeats, in his own terms, the opening of St. John’s Gospel.

One brief utterance from the lips of Christ contains it all; elucidates it all; gives it form and definition; and kindles it as with the light of the Spirit from within: “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

Nobody who reads carefully the statement of Hegel quoted above, on the process of the Spirit, and the union



of man with God, can fail to agree with Hegel's own subsequent statement:

"The profoundest thought is connected with the personality of Christ—with the historical and external; and it is the very grandeur of the Christian religion that, with all this profundity, it is easy of comprehension by our consciousness in its outward aspect, while, at the same time it summons us to penetrate deeper. It is thus adapted to every grade of culture, and yet satisfies the highest requirements."

And this, too, even this, had already been said by that historical Figure, with infinite perfection, and again with that inexplicably sacred nimbus—"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

It was through neglect of these values, which could be perceived here and now, in the actual record, that Renan and so many others went astray. They tried to build up their own independent record, and plunged it in a thousand inconsistencies. Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, that "French novel" as it has justly been called, attempts to depict a beautiful character who is at the same time a despicable impostor; one who could lend himself to a trick at the tomb of Lazarus, and dream of love-affairs in the Garden of Gethsemane. The direct literary test of the values in the Gospels themselves annihilates Renan. Before the fire of one of those burning utterances the romantic creation of Renan shrivels like "a scribbled

form, writ on a parchment." It was disregard of the purely "literary test" that so blinded him to the values of character and personality.

There were other definite results that this merely literary test seemed to offer, again and again, and their force was cumulative. No man whose ear had been attuned to great literature could doubt, for instance, that through all the veils of language and translation this proclamation of a unique Self persisted; and that the Voice which said "I am the Resurrection and the Life" was the same as that which said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." It was the same Voice that said "*I am the Vine, ye are the branches*"; and "Before Abraham was, I AM." Was there ever an assertion like this of a *personal* dominion over the relativity of Time?

Those who point to the fact that the assertion of the complete dominion over death occurs only in the fourth Gospel (the most divine of all) are still confronted by equally stupendous implications elsewhere, such as "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth"; and "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." If the actual expression in the fourth Gospel is more vitally beautiful, is there not a more vital explanation of this than the suggestion that its author was more of a theologian or philosopher than the writers of the other gospels? To me it seems that we overhear in those ineffable cadences and undertones a direct echo of the living voice which it was natural that the beloved disciple should have caught more perfectly, more profoundly, more exquisitely than another. Its pity had breathed upon him

as his head lay upon the divine breast. It is the only adequate explanation of that infinitely tender preparation of his mind for the great farewell, murmuring, with a compassion impossible to man, the consolation that no other could give: "It is expedient for you that I go away. . . . I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you."

Even the little tests of "greatness" that we apply to literature make it impossible for us to regard the most vital passages in a masterpiece as interpolations, especially when those passages are in perfect harmony with the innermost meaning of a thousand others. What are we to say, then, of these brief lightning-flashes from Eternity? Were they thought out? Were they planned by the simple recorder? What supreme and hidden genius (for there can hardly have been more than one) invented, for all four Gospels, passage after passage beyond the reach of all the masters of human expression, passages which coming from human lips would be intolerably blasphemous, and yet by virtue of the divine nimbus that they wear have drawn the world to waste its tears of adoration upon the feet of an imaginary Saviour for nineteen hundred years. What lord of language forged and inserted, in the description of the Last Supper, the consummate sentences that have bowed the heads of so many scores of generations. *This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me.*

Let it be regarded from yet another side. Suppose for the moment that the record is really true, and that this "historical Figure approaching us in Time" did indeed embody the "values of God." Nobody with an ear

attuned to great literature can doubt for a single moment, in that case, that the words attributed to Him by the simple recorders were absolutely worthy even of Him. The words from the Cross, for instance, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," in which the divine Sufferer manifests the divine compassion towards those who nailed Him there, are yet again a proclamation (implied and acted out this time, not asserted) of His own infinitude. But let it be taken with all those other instances, and especially with what is to me the unanswerable instance—*I am the Resurrection and the Life*—and we feel at once that those sentences are perfectly fitting for those divine lips. We should not feel that, in using them, He was falling short of His infinite majesty and holiness.

But it is exactly in the attempt to invent fitting utterance for the Divine—that the masters of merely human expression have always failed. It is one of the commonplaces of literature that even the august spirit of Milton, using the language at perhaps its noblest period, failed and failed miserably in the words that he puts into the mouth of the Son of God. It is a commonplace of criticism that the speeches of his Satan are among the most magnificent ever penned; that, in describing the unattainable light of Heaven he attains sublimity, but that, both in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, except where he directly borrows from the great original, he is utterly inadequate. Thousands can quote line after line of those burning words that he attributes to the fallen archangel. We all remember that courage:

“Never to submit or yield,  
And what is else not to be overcome.”

But who remembers two consecutive lines of the words that Milton puts into the mouth of the Son of God? There are few who remember a single phrase. The following lines are perhaps the best of them:

“I through the ample air in triumph high  
Shall lead hell captive, maugre hell, and show  
The powers of darkness bound. Thou, at the sight  
Pleased, out of heaven shalt look down and smile  
While, by thee raised, I ruin all my foes,  
Death last, and with his carcase glut the grave.”

They deal with the same subject as what I have called the supreme instance of the Divine utterance in the New Testament; and by a curious accident an exact ground for comparison is offered here. The noblest measure in the English language, the measure into which its finest utterances have fallen as though in accordance with a natural law, is the measure in which Milton wrote his epics, and Shakespeare wrote the greater part of his dramatic works. The greatest line of Shakespeare himself in that measure is perhaps the line in *Hamlet*,

“Absent thee from felicity awhile.”

It is merely an accident, from the human point of view, though perhaps in the eternal aspect a breath of inspiration, that an obscure translator, in the age of Shakespeare, should have written, not only the greatest single line in Shakespeare's own measure, but a single line that in

itself outweighs all the wonders of his combined works, and compresses more meaning into its ten syllables. It is a line that has been spoken as the final living truth over myriads of graves, and has burned through myriads of desolate minds with a new conviction of immortality. What criticism can fathom that profound calm or explain it?

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

Art and literature are confronted here by a Presence that shrivels them into insignificance; and there is no answer to its instant question—Whom say ye that I am?” but the answer of Peter, “Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God.”



## CHAPTER XXVI

*He lives and reigns, throned above Space and Time.  
New every morning the creative Word  
Moves upon chaos. Yea, our God grows young.  
Here, now, the eternal miracle is renewed.  
Now, and for ever, God makes heaven and earth.*

THE BOOK OF EARTH





## CHAPTER XXVI

IN this kind of way, and not from one but from a thousand directions, I was led to one conclusion, the conclusion foreshadowed at the end of the last chapter.

It was a conclusion which, at the back of my mind, almost from childhood, I had thought was impossible for me. I had acquiesced in the contemporary mood, according to which it was the outworn belief of a bygone age. It was obviously being allowed to lapse by almost every section of the modern intellectual world, except one. Philosophers, like Edward Caird, even when they accepted the Christian idealism, made it quite clear that, for them, the central doctrine of Christendom meant something quite different from the doctrine that had hitherto been the very keystone of the whole great structure.

But these later philosophers had made it clearer and clearer to me that the Christian scheme—taken merely as a kind of diagram of the truth—was the most adequate that had ever been developed by the human mind. It was the only scheme that had any pretensions to covering the ground. It was idealistic in its recognition of spiritual values; but it was realistic in its recognition that the conditioned world of our mortality was itself an analogue of the Word “made flesh,” and the tabernacle of that Word. It recognized the problem of finite pain and evil, and took

them to the heart of the uncaused Cause of all things for an answer. It was thus the only truly monistic philosophy; for it made the whole world coherent.

Moreover, where it had been really tried, it had worked as a practical system. It had exalted womanhood, encouraged chivalry, defended the weak, and increased the mental and spiritual stature of mankind. Where it had apparently failed it was because its real principles had been abandoned. It was the only religion that could include the pessimism of *Ecclesiastes* and the joy of the *Gloria in Excelsis*, in a consistent philosophy. All others were fragmentary, seizing a truth here and a truth there, but ending in falsehood through their one-sidedness.

Using it merely as a diagram, I realized how marvellously interdependent all its doctrines were. Clauses of the creed that, taken separately, might be regarded as "accretions" were seen to be interlocked inevitably with others; and, if one were removed, the whole structure collapsed.

The supreme Being of Voltaire, for instance, must be capable of pity, and I was content to accept the more than emphatic verdict of Voltaire on that point, just as I was content to accept the even more solemn verdict of Huxley that the Eternal required mercy and justice. But I could not accept these spasmodic and disconnected verdicts without realizing how they confirmed the steadfast and consistent Christian philosophy, according to which that supreme pity, that eternal justice, that transcendent mercy were something more than fine words from a French revolutionary, or an impressive bit of rhetoric

from an English materialist. If Voltaire and Huxley were right, and I believed them to be right on this matter, as on many others, there were certain consequences. The eternal Being could not possess all those attributes unless the eternal Being acted in accordance with them. The Christian philosophy had a theory as to this action. It involved the sublime, but sublimely rational idea that the eternal creative Power had a purpose and even an interest in the creative process; that all this organization of "matter" into vehicles and tabernacles for minds, or forms having significance for minds, was an intelligible system, an embodiment or incarnation, of divine ideas; that the purpose was nothing less than the making of personalities or souls who might share this joy for ever; that the incarnational process was, therefore, in many ways educational, an evolutionary preparation for a higher order of being in which we should see more clearly what we now saw only obscurely; and that the method of bringing us into communion with the Supreme was necessarily symbolic and sacramental, in the sense intended by Wordsworth when he said of the works of human imagination:

"The religious man values what he sees chiefly as an imperfect shadowing forth of what he is incapable of seeing. The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without resting a great part of the burden on words and symbols, by a process where much is represented in little, and the infinite Being accommodates

Himself to a finite capacity. In all this may be perceived the affinity between poetry and religion."

The affinity between this intellectual scheme, this diagram of ideas, and the facts which (according to the philosophy of Christendom) did actually accord with the scheme and confirm the diagram, shines out at once in the inspired lines of Crashaw:

"Welcome all wonders in one sight!

Eternity shut in a span!

Summer in winter! Day in night!

Heaven on earth! and God in man!

Great little one, whose all-embracing birth

Lifts earth to Heaven, stoops Heaven to earth."

The modern philosopher will recognize clearly enough in those lines (quite apart from their bearing on the creed) the affinity of Crashaw's ideas and his own purely intellectual attempts to "round the circle of infinity." For my own part I found in them the perfect statement of what I had called earlier "the ultimate paradox"; and I could hardly believe that all the affinities and accords could be entirely divorced from "facts." I could not believe that the scheme with which they were concerned existed in a kind of intellectual vacuum, and that, while it had actually been suggested to us by our experience of life, the mysteries of the universe, and the necessities of thought, it was nevertheless a "pure ideal," entirely discarnate, and had no definite practical connection with the history of the world around us.

It was only in this direction that I seemed to get the

faintest glimmer of a meaning in the vast organization of the "material" universe as a dwelling place and means of intercommunication between minds.

Despite the light thrown upon "matter" by the new science, in whose picture of nature—as Sir James Jeans puts it—"nothing non-mental has survived," the "material world" still seemed to be viewed with the old Manichæan suspicion in certain religious circles, as though it were the antithesis, or contradiction, of the spiritual. But if this "material" universe did indeed depend upon the uncaused Cause, as so many philosophers, ancient and modern, had so overwhelmingly agreed, it could hardly be regarded as a mere object lesson of its own worthlessness and futility. If the uncaused Cause was indeed responsible for all these "material" forms; these physical vehicles of thought and feeling and affection; these complicated organizations which divided us from one another, and from our Maker, as though by a deliberate framework wherein our personality was to develop; there must be some deeper purpose in these elaborate arrangements than the mere provision of a phantasmagorical foil to the splendidly remote abstractions of the Platonists. For me, the visible world and its beauty existed and were good; and it seemed that their noblest function was to convey the invisible things of the Spirit. Art, as well as philosophy, had borne overwhelming witness to these sacramental values, and the incarnational nature of the whole scheme.

Goethe, the first intellectual poet of the modern world, and perhaps the greatest intellect in European literature since Shakespeare, had spoken even more definitely than

Wordsworth. His profound philosophical and scientific grasp of the nature of things and his cold half-agnostic, half-pantheistic detachment from all religious partisanship, gave a peculiar weight to the striking passage on sacramental religion in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. It is a passage that has been singularly neglected by his biographers and commentators—partly because they disliked to face the fact that his mind was broad enough to include the terms of pure Catholicism. But nobody can rightly understand the Goethe of *Faust* who does not understand the Catholic element in his world-co-ordinating mind. I omit his criticism of the sacramental deficiencies of certain kinds of Protestantism, for it is unnecessary to the main argument, and my desire is not controversy, but truth.

“The sacraments,” wrote Goethe, “are the highest part of religion, the visible symbols of divine grace. In the Lord’s Supper earthly lips are allowed to receive the embodiment of a Divine Being, and partake of heavenly food in the form of earthly nourishment. The meaning of the Sacrament is identical in all Christian churches. Whether the Sacrament is taken with more or less acceptance of the mystery, or with more or less accommodation to the intelligible, it always remains a great holy act, representative in the world of fact of what man can neither attain nor do without. But such a sacrament should not stand alone; no Christian can partake of it with the true joy for which it is given, if the symbolical or sacramental sense is not fostered within

him. He must be accustomed to regard the inner religion of the heart and that of the external church as absolutely one, as the great universal sacrament, which again resolves itself into many others, and communicates to these separate rites its holiness, indestructibleness and eternity."

Responsibilities, as well as intellectual difficulties, might be evaded if we transferred the real scene of action to an ideal world, out of space, out of time, and perhaps out of existence altogether. It was a reversal even of the incarnational methods of art and poetry to deny the local habitation, annul the name, and attempt to feed on airy nothings. The theory of Goethe was the real answer to the fallacious attempt, which was noted earlier, to detach the Christian religion from "fact" and history, and view it merely as a kind of disembodied plan or intellectual pattern of eternal truth in an unseen world elsewhere. The scheme itself involved the full meaning of the words *verbum caro factum est*—a real interaction between the uncaused Cause and our own mortality, in the world of Time. This, and nothing less, was the "idea" to which—according to Goethe—religion might legitimately "attach its emotion." It involved definite relations to the "facts" of this world, and a definite effect upon them. The effect was here, in Goethe's universal church, or nowhere.

If we accepted no more than the beliefs which were held by Herbert Spencer, Huxley and Voltaire concerning their "eternal," "super-natural," "just," "merciful," "supreme" Cause of all things, we could hardly affirm



on *a priori* grounds (in the manner of Hume's famous argument against miracles) that those attributes and supreme values (attributes and values which cannot exist in anything *less* than conscious Personality) could have no consequences in our world of "facts"; and that there could be no sign, mark or manifestation of anything but blind mechanism anywhere in the wide circle of the universe around us, or in our own practical experience.

I began to see that modern "rationalism," so far from having undermined the deep foundations of religion, was merely scratching on the surface and that, although it had often forced incompetent defenders of religion into superficial, false and apparently hypocritical evasions and ambiguities, the essential and profound falsity was really on the other side. There was something radically wrong about this agnostic readiness to bow the head in reverence before a supreme Reality, endowed with the supreme attributes, and then to sweep it aside with a brisk now-we-can-get-down-to-the-"facts," which tell a very different and indeed a contradictory story. It dawned upon me that, in the profoundest sense of all, it was the "rationalists" who were breaking the continuity of the universe, and trying to destroy the universal reign of law. The great intellectual council that drew up the Nicene Creed, whether we accepted the ancient terms of its statement or not, was at least enunciating a more consistent and universal monism than these narrow specialists who wanted to tell two entirely contradictory stories, and have it both ways.

The latter seemed to be even more inconsistent when, with a philosophical air, they pointed us first to a sort of no-man's land of eternal truths, a "kingdom of the mind," where Platonic "ideas" could reign undisturbed by the vulgar "facts" of everyday life; and then made it quite clear that "illusory" as these "facts" might be in their armchair theory, they were the adamantine realities of their actual practice. The eternal truths could be played with at will, could be shaped and dissolved like clouds in a lotus-eater's dream. But the "facts"—those "illusions"—were sacred. The eternal truths were like the noble philanthropic sentiments of a public orator; but the "facts"—the illusory "facts"—were his real, un-touchable, private property. In the same breath Matthew Arnold had told us that the "facts" belonged to the world of mere appearances; but that Religion, the Religion of eternal truth, approached them at her peril. If there were any collision between them, it would be the eternal truth, not the adamantine though (according to Arnold) illusory and almost contemptible "facts" of the phenomenal world that would have to give way.

Science had taught me to respect "facts," and I had learned elsewhere to believe in the eternal truths. I did not believe that there was this breach between temporal fact and eternal truth. It seemed to me that religion and philosophy were dying of their own abstractions.

The realism of Goethe was thus justified from two opposite points of view. Tyndall thought we should have more respect for naturalistic science if we had learned from Goethe, in youth, to look on "matter" as the "garment of

God"; while, for religion, the whole scheme of things depended on the idea that the Eternal had entered into the world of time and human experience.

It was an incarnational scheme; and this gave a glimmer of meaning to the existence of what we called the "material world." But an incarnational scheme in which the Incarnation never took place was a contradiction in terms. The obscure language of Hegel and other philosophers had disguised the meaninglessness of the attempt. It made an irrational cleavage between the creation and its Cause.

Either the scheme was false, and completely misrepresented the realities of the universe; or, if it was true, it must have its consequences in the world of concrete facts, of human experience, and the history of mankind. It was a scheme of the relationship between God and the world of time; and it was utterly impossible to eliminate that relationship without eliminating the scheme itself. It was just as impossible as it would be to talk of the "Light whose smile kindles the universe," and then to announce that we would accept the idea as an eternal truth, provided that the actual kindling of the universe was omitted, or regarded as taking place in principle, but not in actual fact. The whole scheme of the majestic philosophy of Christendom crumbled into dust if this interaction was cancelled.

I have dwelt upon this aspect of the matter, and repeated the argument from various angles, because it seemed to me to have inevitable consequences, and these consequences (co-ordinated once more with the con-

clusions already reached along a thousand other lines of thought) completely ruled out any of the vacillations of contemporary religion.

The "unique event" described by Hegel was not the apotheosis of a man. Nor were the historical acts with which he clothed it the garments of an abstraction. We were asked to believe in One who was best described in the simple, unphilosophical, but far more profound language of the Bible, which Hegel himself quoted to elucidate his thought: One whose spirit came from God as light comes from the sun and is still one with its source—or in the magnificently clear-cut formula of the Nicene Creed: *Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero; genitum non factum, consubstantialtem Patri; per quem omnia facta sunt. Qui propter nos homines, et propter nostram salutem, descendit de coelis. Et incarnatus est. . .*

It was God stooping from the heights to meet the limited faculties of man in his own bodily frame-work. It was not the mere evolution from below of an unusual man with a unique religious gift, as certain modern theologians would suggest, in their passion for extracting plus from minus. If, however, we insist on the figure of ascent from below rather than that of descent from above we may still regard Him as proceeding from that ultimate Being in whom the whole evolutionary process originated, and as embodying the "values of God" so perfectly that we can use no better words of Him than the Nicene formula, *Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine. . .*

Plato and Hegel could find no more meaning than the philosophy of Christendom could find in a Mediator who

was merely human, or a bridge that was built on only one side of the abyss, and ended in thin air. Such a being would still be in the position of an inductive philosopher struggling upwards towards an infinitely remote Truth which he could never reach, and could never pretend to reveal with authority; and if this were all that we could assert of the Christ, the whole structure of the Christian religion was shattered. The cruel death of one more good man would simply add one more difficulty to the very problem which the divine self-sacrifice had claimed to solve, not only in the most vital and central clauses of the Christian creed but in that great system of thought, independently evolved by Hegel and his followers, which does actually represent the highest and deepest achievement of philosophy during the last three hundred years. It would all have to be swept aside for no better reason than the *a priori* assumption of dull minds that this appallingly mysterious universe, dependent as it was on an utterly "unknowable" and "super-natural" Power, could have no such mysteries at its heart. Our own hearts had been filled, at that source, or nowhere, with ideas of divine grace, divine compassion, and—strangely enough—with the baffling ideals of Christianity; but the greatness, once more, was in us, not in That which ultimately made us.

It seemed to me that the contemporary inability to believe the opposite arose from a lack of realism rather than from too much of it. Inability to believe that the Author of our being and Maker of our souls might care for us and even communicate with us through the sacra-

mental system of His own creation, was not necessarily an indication of imaginative or intellectual power. It might arise from blindness of just the kind which was discussed in an earlier chapter; blindness to the stupendous nature of the world around us, blindness to the miraculous system in which our own minds and bodies interacted, blindness to the infinite mystery of that which we could see and touch and handle. From mere custom we accepted as commonplace, and took for granted, a series of facts which, to denizens of another planet, might seem more weird than anything imagined by Dante; and yet we deprecated as too marvellous to be true the far less startling ideas of the religious philosophers who thought that the emergence of the spirit of man in so strange a world required an adequate explanation. We confused the inconceivable (or what was inconceivable to finite minds) with what was untrue; and we were therefore sometimes in the false position of rejecting, or disbelieving, the conclusions to which reason itself had led us. Minds that shrank from believing what was inconceivable in the philosophy of Christendom were nevertheless able, through the blindness of custom, to take their own inconceivable existence in an incredible universe for granted. They were surrounded by inconceivables—infinite Space, infinite Time,—matter that was infinitely divisible, and thoughts that were imponderable, invisible and without extension. They shrank from believing in the inconceivable but rationally postulated attributes of the supernatural Power behind the whole scheme of things, and did not see that they were left with something far worse

than the inconceivable—the utterly irrational alternatives that the whole scheme of things originated either in nothing, or in something endowed with attributes inadequate to the transcendent mystery of its own eternal and self-sufficient existence. In any case, as Spencer demonstrated, they were left ultimately with the supernatural.

The exquisitely interdependent scheme of the Christian philosophy definitely involved that supernatural and eternal Being in our mortal destiny, our mortal griefs and pains. The burden, as well as the government, was upon that Being. We could bear our part, because it was borne there also and, if we could think that any pang of ours contributed to the final consummation, our human destiny was touched with light from a nobler realm. Modern science, with her picture of Nature red in tooth and claw; modern philosophy with its “creative evolution,” were only elaborating the details of St. Paul’s vision of “the whole creation groaning and travailing together,” with Calvary as its consummate centre.

But the philosophical solution of the darkest riddle of the universe depended upon just that eternal Act of Self-sacrifice. There, in that one uplifted Figure, the whole scheme was focused into significant form. It was the point where the upward evolution of the race was met half-way; the point where God stooped to men that men might rise to God. The incarnation threw a new light upon the whole “material” creation. It was the perfect expression of *L’Amor che move il sole e l’altre stelle*. It revealed an intelligible purpose in the mysterious

constitution of "matter" as a sacramental system. We need no longer shrink in Manichæan horror from "matter" as though it were the enemy of the spirit; for it could be the instrument and dwelling-place of the Eternal. The embodied Christ Himself was the first sacrament, and His crucifixion was the first elevation of the Host.

















30

319



UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



142 244

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY